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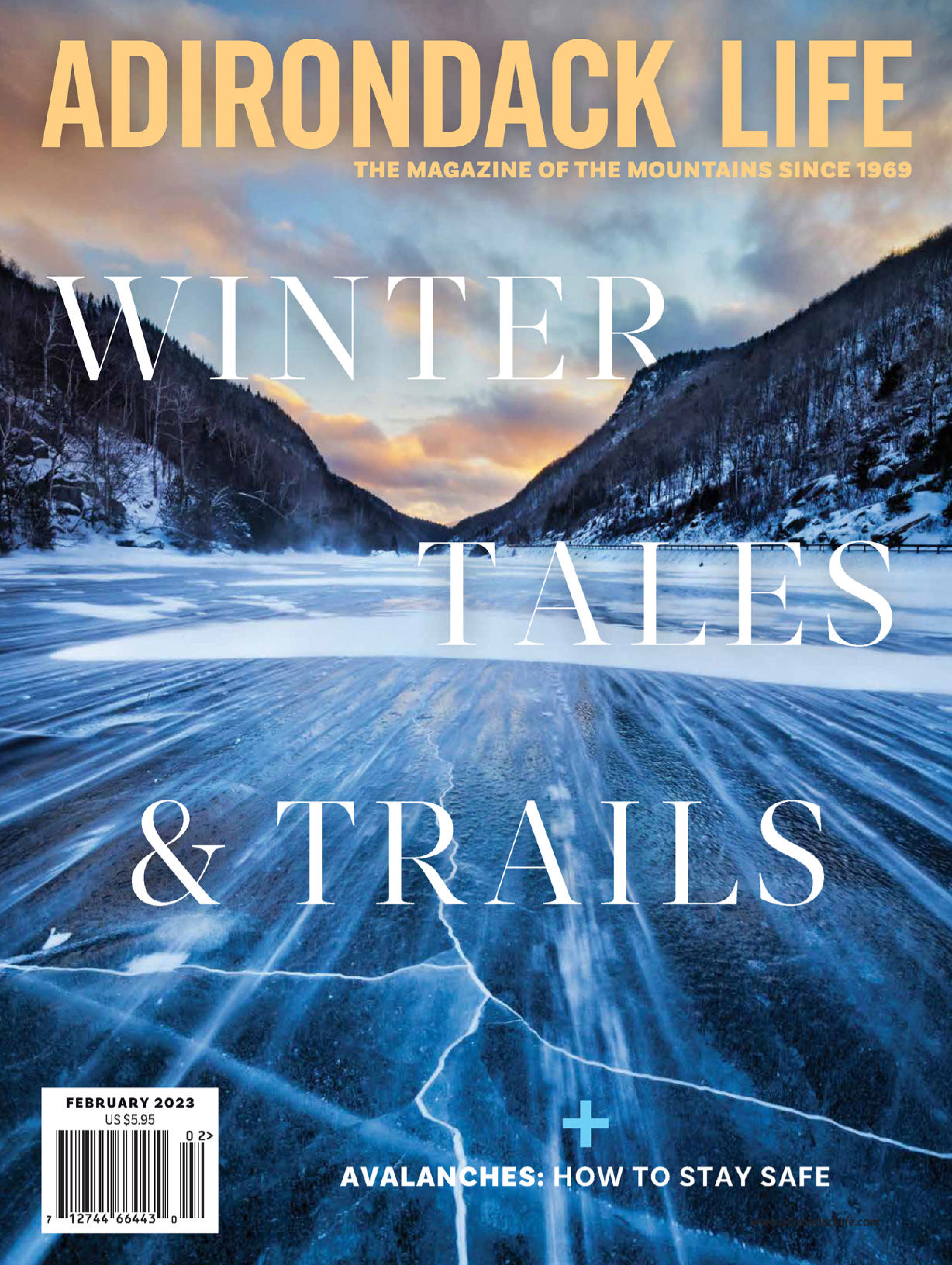

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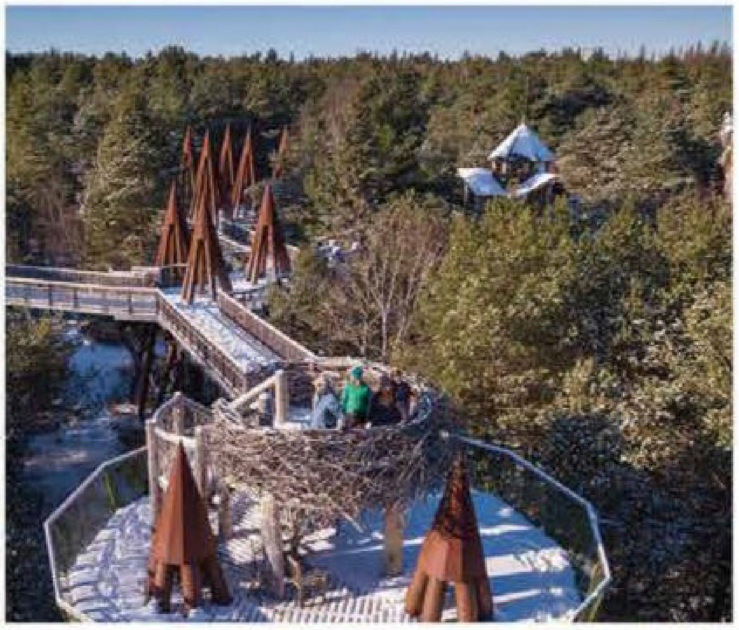

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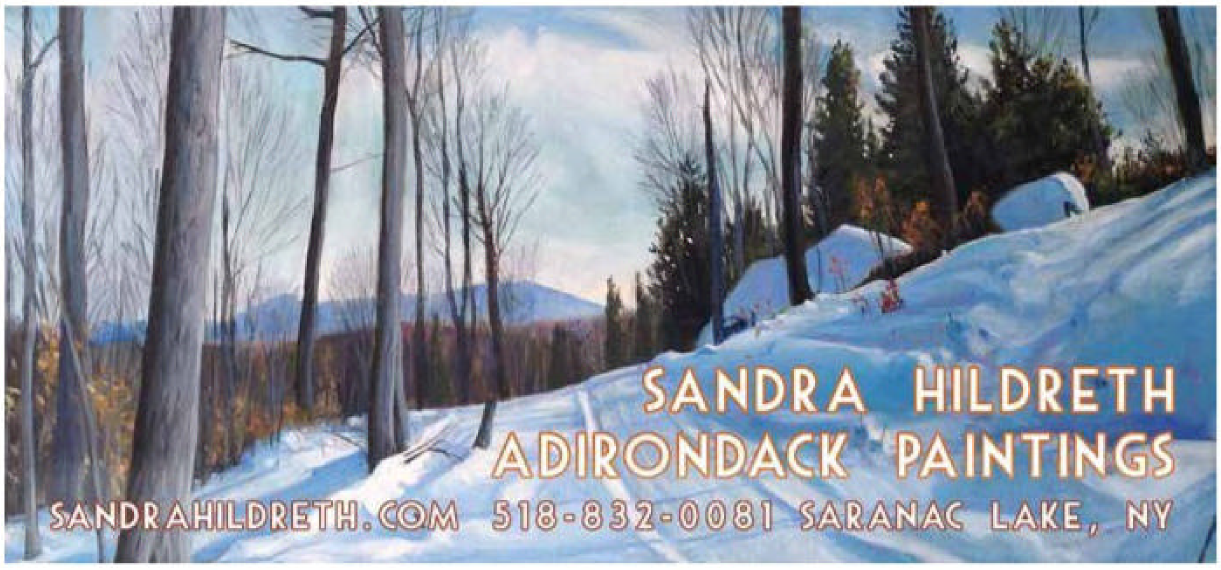

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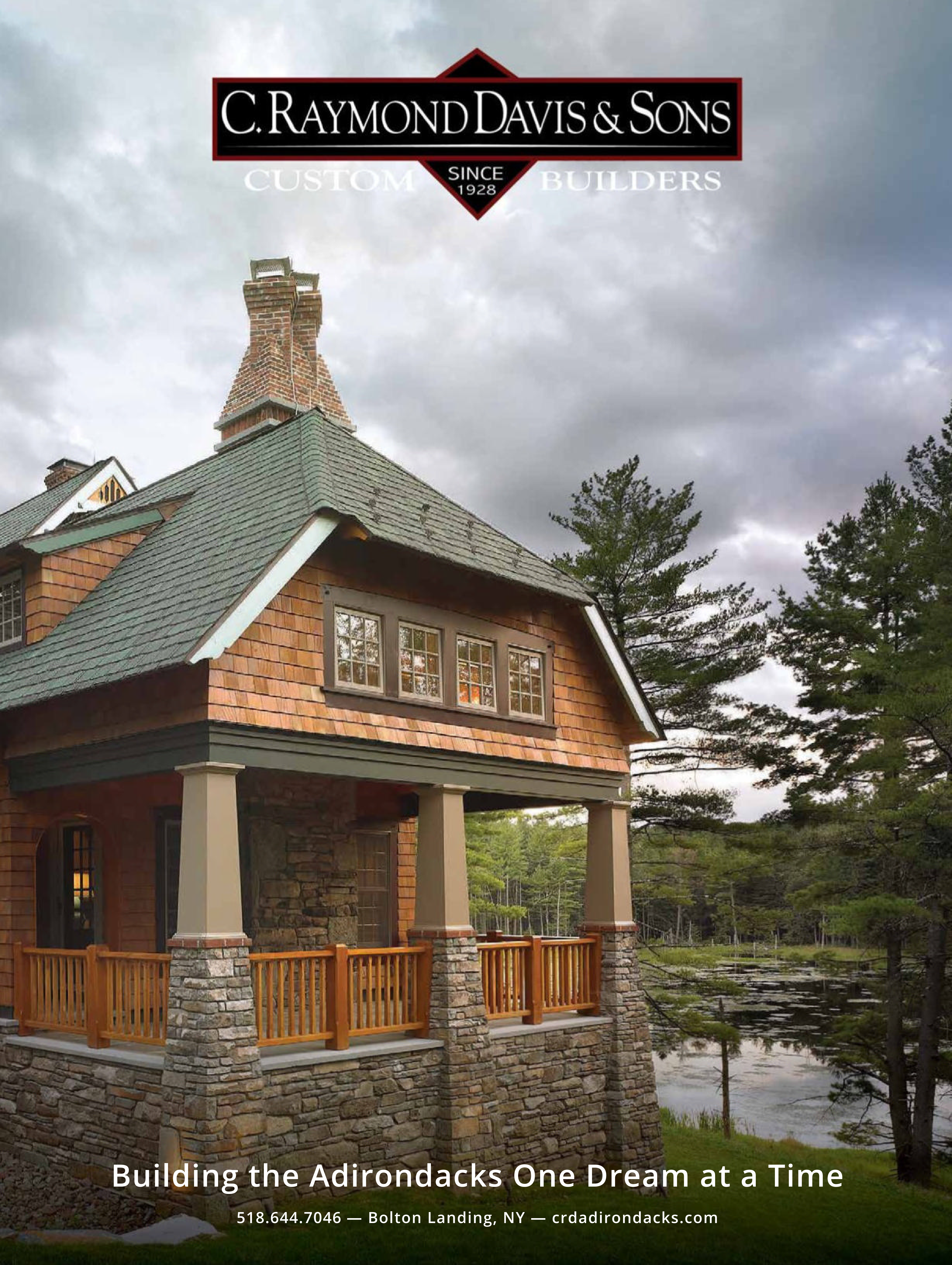
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TIMELESS STYLE

We want to thank all of you at *Adirondack Life* for the sensational *At Home in the Adirondacks 2022* issue featuring rustic style. It was so wonderful to see in print and photos how your magazine values local artisans and the art of rustic. It is articles such as these that spur interest in handmade rustic furniture made in the Adirondacks. I've heard from a local interior designer that Adirondack rustic is "over." We can testify that it is not. We are quite sure that your magazine will help keep the art of rustic alive and well.

Joanne & Larry Post, L. Post Rustics
Au Sable Forks, NY

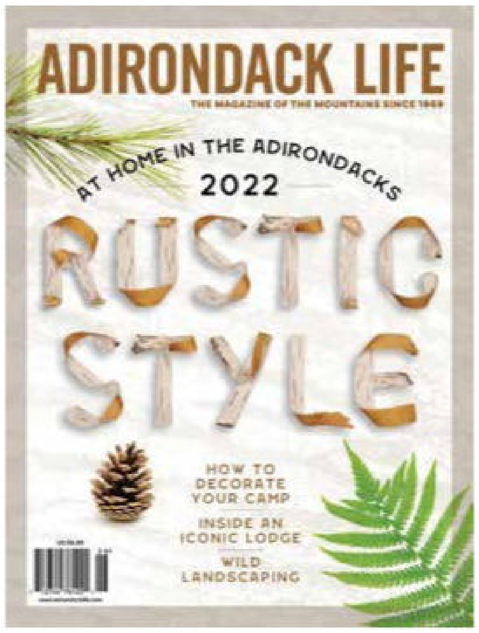
BACKGROUND STORY

I was glad to read "The Standoff" by Adam Federman in your October 2022 issue. This article goes into so much depth, finally giving the story of the Ganienkeh Mohawk nation and their brief settlement at the lake the attention, context and thorough reporting that it deserves.

Moss Lake is one of my favorite places in the Adirondacks—I've walked the trail around the lake in all seasons and its tranquility is perfect for kayaking and paddle-boarding. I've wondered about its history, which seemed like a mystery to me even though there is that "helpful" signage at the start of the trail. As the author points out, the single sentence about the Mohawks occupying the site and eventually moving their settlement north raises a slew of questions. This article answered those questions for me and raised a new awareness about Native American history in the Adirondacks. Thank you for your stellar reporting.

Erin Kessler
Boonville, NY

ON THE SCENE



I read with interest the article on the Mohawk takeover of Moss Lake. As a journalism student at Syracuse University, I visited the encampment and wrote about it myself. I interviewed Kawirakeron, the Mohawks' spokesman, as well as local residents. Whites were not allowed inside the camp. When I arrived I met two young Mohawk men guarding the entrance. As we chatted, a hawk hovered overhead. The men got into a dispute: Was it a broad-winged hawk? Was it a red-tailed hawk? This struck me as emblematic of the Mohawk predicament: they had become so estranged from the natural world and their roots that they could no longer identify a hawk. The takeover was an attempt to fix that.

As the article notes, the Presbyterian church provided aid to the Mohawks. After the camp fired on passing cars, locals displayed bumper stickers saying "Don't Shoot: I'm Presbyterian." Many residents were angry that the state police did not enter the camp to investigate the shootings. The Mohawks were armed and ready to defend themselves. "They don't want another Attica," the owner of Drake's Inn told me, referring to state officials. I believe he meant that as a rebuke, but restraint was the prudent course. Bloodshed was avoided, and eventually a peaceful solution was found.

Phil Brown
Saranac Lake, NY

Adirondack Life welcomes the views of readers. All letters are subject to editing, must be signed and should be addressed to Box 410, Jay, NY 12941.
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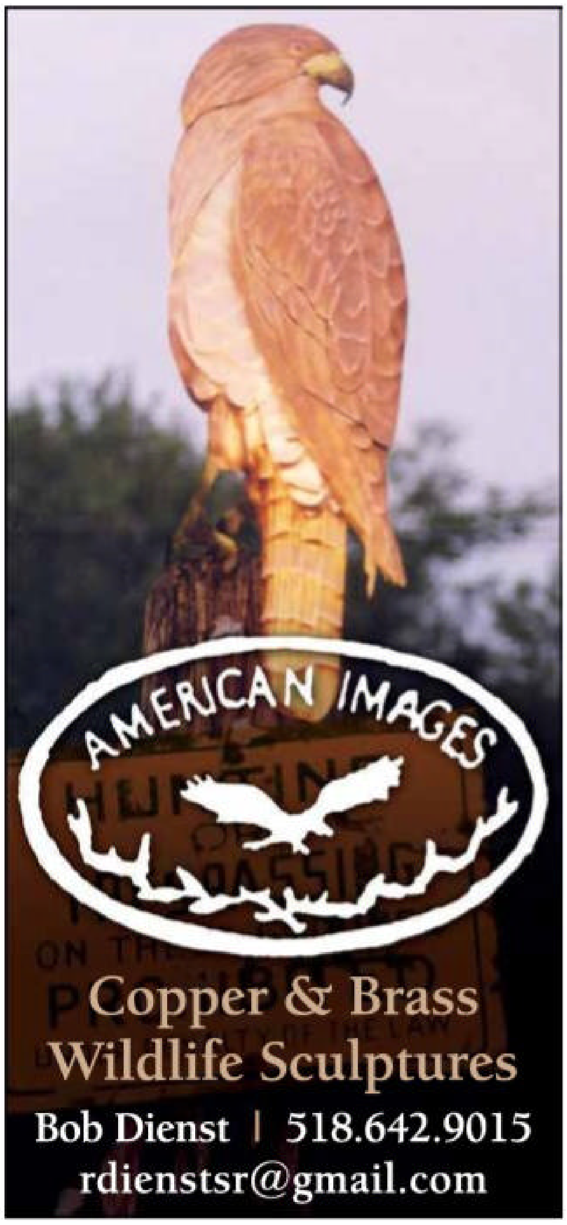
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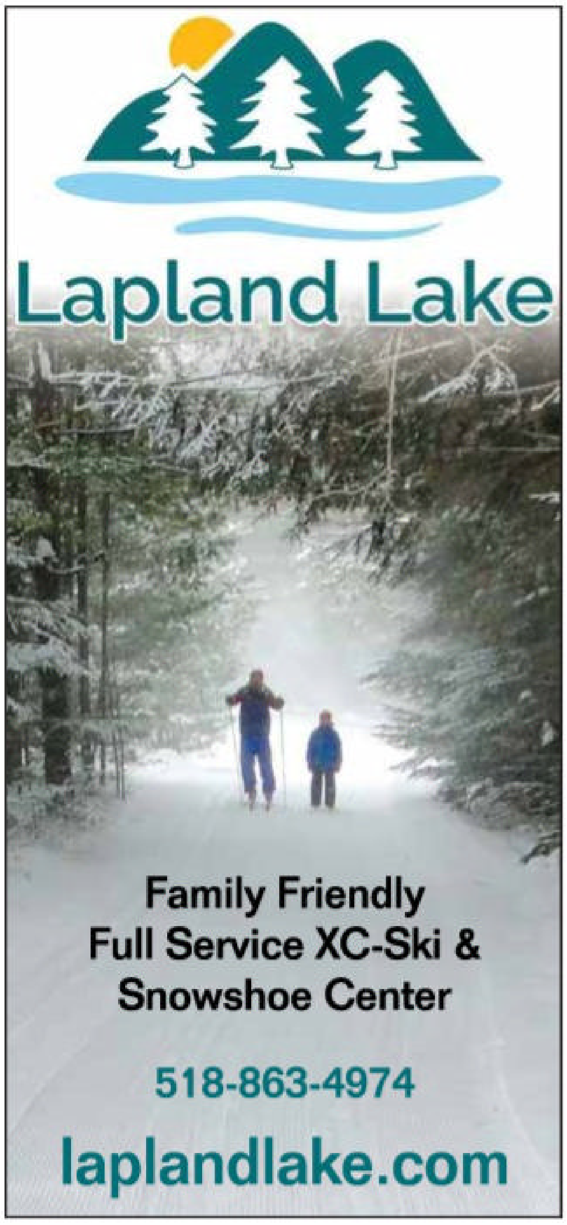
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Short Carries

The Upside Down

Introducing another Lake Placid

BY ANNIE STOLTIE

"Lake Placid is the most wonderful town in the world," says Giggles. "The people here are so friendly and giving—talking about it, I get tears in my eyes." The 78-year-old, aka Sandy Pelski, graduated from the first clown class at Toby's Clown Foundation and School, in Lake Placid, three decades ago. Today, and more than 1,000 graduates later, she's an instructor there, teaching future clowns magic, pie-throwing, face-painting and how to make massive bubbles. "It's just so rewarding," she says.

Giggles and her colleagues—Silly Willy, Supercute and String Bean, among others—often take Lake Placid walkabouts. In full makeup and clown attire, they step, some of them in oversized shoes, into the Winn–Dixie and other places in the community, chatting with locals as well as sightseers visiting Lake Placid, voted the Most Interesting Town in America by *Reader's Digest*.

That designation is, in part, because of the town's Caladium Festival. For a weekend each July, folks come from all over to see fields of ornamental leafy plants that stretch on and on, like candy-colored bowling lanes. Because 98 percent of the global supply of caladium tubers now come from Lake Placid—the plant, also called elephant ear and heart of Jesus, is native to Central and South America—the town is known as the Caladium Capital of the World. Festival attendees buy tubers or potted plants, mingle with crafters, check out vintage cars and motorbikes, and line up for Giggles and friends' face-painting booth.

Lake Placid's caladiums and its clown population—more per capita than anywhere in the country—give Jennifer Bush, executive director of the Greater Lake Placid Chamber of Commerce, plenty to talk about, but she says it's the 40-plus murals painted around town that bring tens of thousands of tourists each year.

"In the late 1980s and early '90s a lot of businesses closed and this was a sleepy town," she says. Then, in 1992, the Lake Placid Mural Society was launched. Locals Harriet and Bob Porter, while on a motorcycle tour, stopped in a town in British Columbia that was covered in murals. They thought something like that could bring Lake Placid back to life—and it worked. Now Lake Placid is America's Town of Murals, each one depicting local history and flora and fauna. In *The Cracker Trail Cattle Drive*, cowmen drive their animals through Lake Placid to market on a precarious trail, long before there were roads across the state. Another, *The Tropical State Bank Robbery*, shows Lake Placid's first attempted bank robbery, in 1931, when 10-year-old Grady Par-

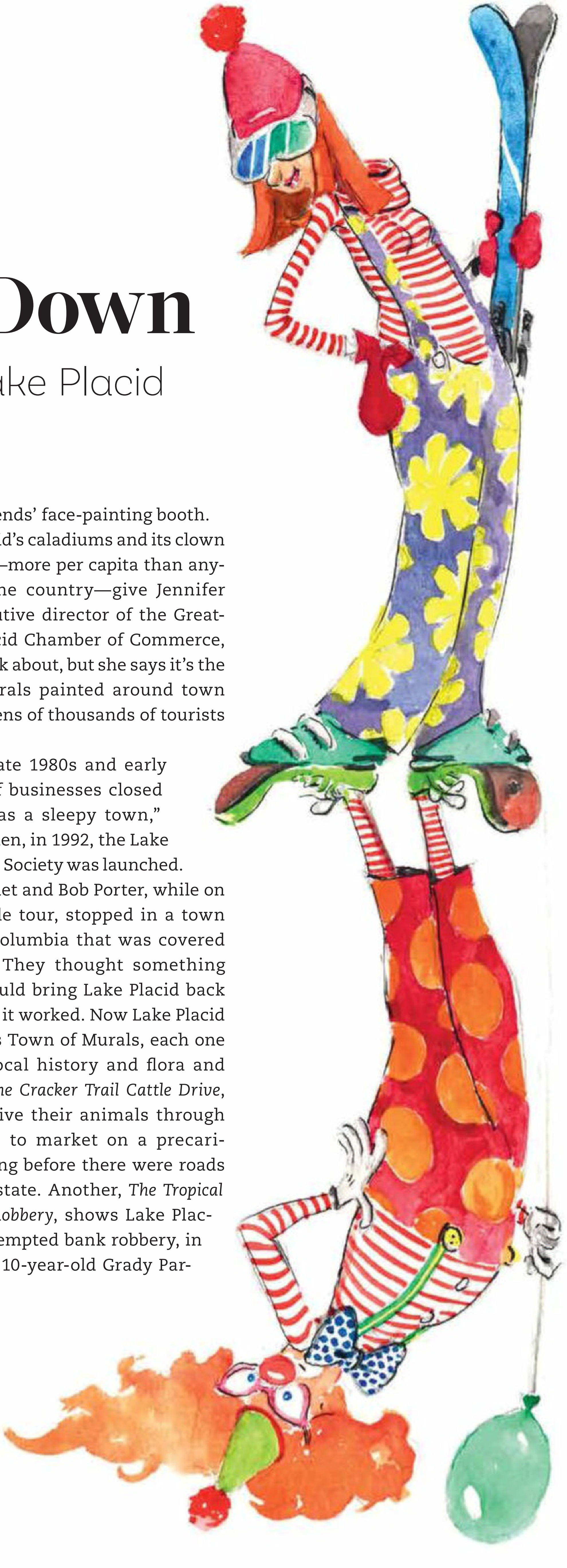

Illustration by Mark Wilson

rish foiled two suspicious men in wigs.

The chamber's Jennifer Bush has lived in Lake Placid for 34 years and says it still feels like "*The Andy Griffith Show*, where everyone waves at you, everyone knows everybody." The town's year-round population of 2,500 or so is scattered across a region that includes 29 lakes. There's swimming, boating and tubing on Lake Mirror, as well as most other lakes here, but "alligators can be found in all bodies of water," she says.

Which comes as a surprise to those who mistakenly call the chamber, looking for another Lake Placid. "At least every day when I pick up the phone, I hear, 'We're coming up this weekend,' or 'Are the sled dogs running?' and I know immediately they're talking about the Lake Placid in New York. I think it's great," says Bush. "It gives me a chance to talk about this town."

That sometimes means mentioning Melvil Dewey, who, in addition to establishing the Dewey Decimal System, started the Lake Placid Club in the Adirondacks in 1895. His exclusive resort dominated the little mountain community in North Elba, where clubhouses and winter sports became a centerpiece. In 1925, while searching for a warm-weather location for a sister resort, Dewey discovered Lake Stearns in south-central Florida. Eventually, he convinced the state legislature to change the name of the town to Lake Placid, just like the village 1,500 miles to the north.

According to the Lake Placid Historical Society's Maria Hagg, Dewey was instrumental in bringing passenger service to this remote stretch of Florida, building a depot along the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad to ease travel to his new, sprawling Litl Loj resort. That, of course, is depicted in a mural of the man himself, holding a map, a train chugging behind him. Dewey died here in 1931, says Hagg, but he's "buried up there with y'all."

Giggles says, "I don't know what Lake Placid up there is like, but I will be here on the lake until my dying days, clowning and being with family. I never want to live anyplace else."

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Top Students

The International University Sports Federation (FISU) Winter Games, held every two years at sport meccas around the world, are coming to Lake Placid in 2023. From January 12 to 22, elite collegiate athletes from 50 countries will compete in Alpine and Nordic skiing, biathlon, curling, figure and speed skating, ice hockey and more. In addition to Lake Placid venues, events will be held in Wilmington, Saranac Lake, North Creek, Potsdam and Canton. Find a schedule, along with up-to-date information on road closures, parking and shuttles, at www.lakeplacid2023.com.

Photograph courtesy of FISU

Natural Genius

Ecologist Robin Kimmerer, author of *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*, SUNY Distinguished Teaching Professor at the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry and founder of the Center for Native Peoples and the Environment, has been named a 2022 MacArthur Fellow. Kimmerer, who is a member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation, promotes a model of environmental stewardship that combines Western scientific tradition and Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK). "This feels like an affirmation of the important contributions of generations of indigenous knowledge holders to how we care for the Earth," she says of the award, commonly known as a "genius grant."

Kimmerer is a longtime contributor to *Adirondack Life*; read "The Giving Tree" (December 2005), "Where the Land Is Teacher" (2013 *Guide to the Great Outdoors*), "The Legacy of Fire" (April 2016) and more of her work at adirondacklife.com.

From the Adirondacks to Antarctica

Paul Smith's College Adirondack Watershed Institute research technician Lija Treibergs headed to Antarctica in November for three months of field-based research at the McMurdo Dry Valleys' lakes. Researchers for the McMurdo Dry Valleys Long Term Ecological Research Project are studying how different ecological systems change over time—knowledge that Treibergs says will parallel her work in our region. "Lakes of the dry valleys are extremely sensitive to climate change and what we learn from research there has connections and implications for our lakes here in the Adirondacks."

Follow Treibergs's work on the Adirondack Watershed Institute's Facebook, Twitter and Instagram accounts.

Support Service

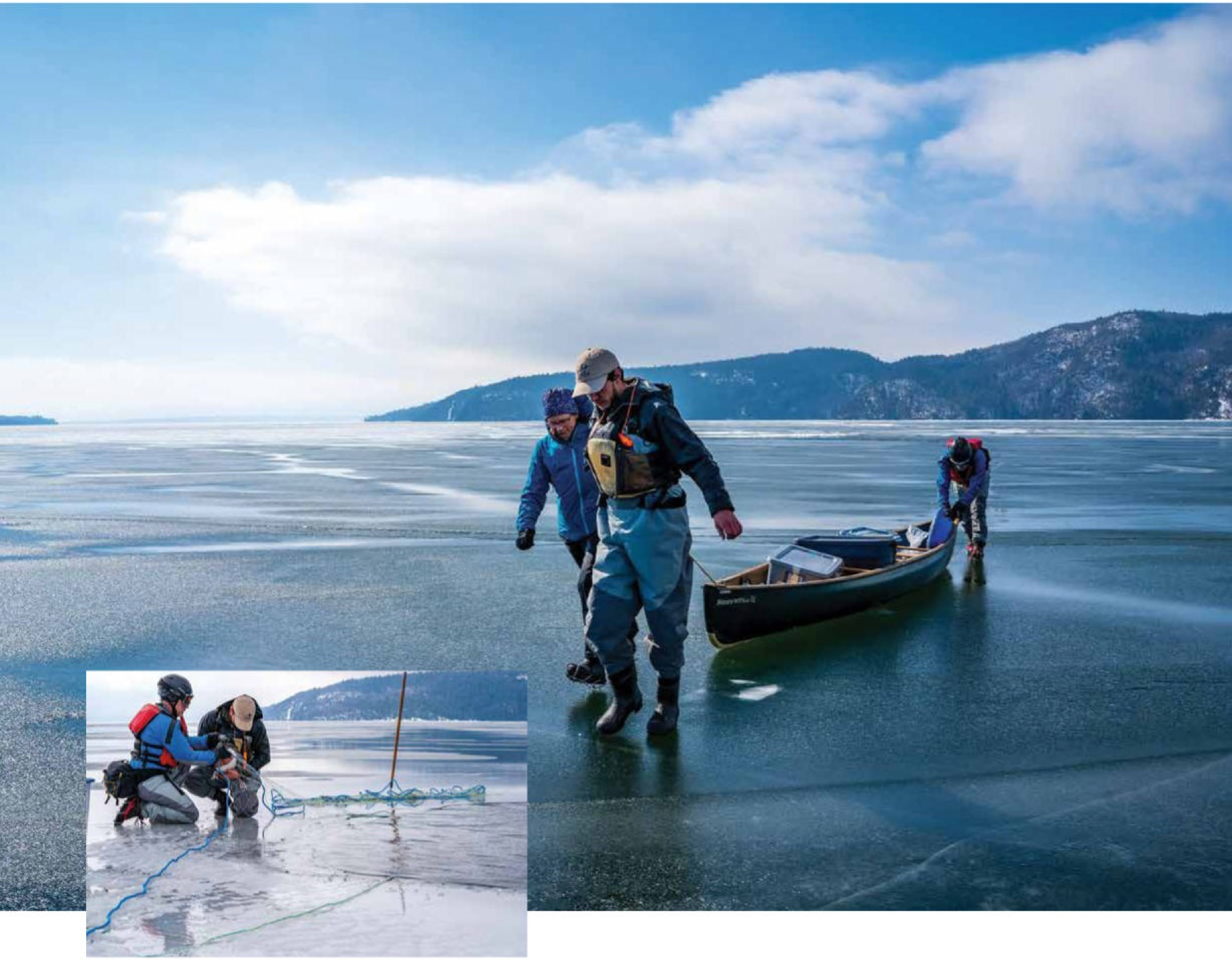
In September Homeward Bound Adirondacks (518-354-5144, www.homewardboundadirondacks.org) was one of only 80 organizations nationwide to receive a $750,000 Staff Sergeant Parker Gordon Fox Suicide Prevention Grant from the Department of Veterans Affairs. The funds will be used to support Homeward Bound's healing wilderness retreats, as well as crisis outreach, workshops and other suicide prevention programs for North Country vets. Read more about the organization's impact in "Homeward Bound" (December 2020) at adirondacklife.com.

Homeward Bound

SOLDIERS AND VETERANS FIND PEACE IN THE ADIRONDACKS

BY BRIAN CASTNER
PHOTOGRAPHS BY

Kimmerer photograph by Nancie Battaglia. Treibergs photograph by Brendan Wiltse. Loon rescue photographs by Eric Teed

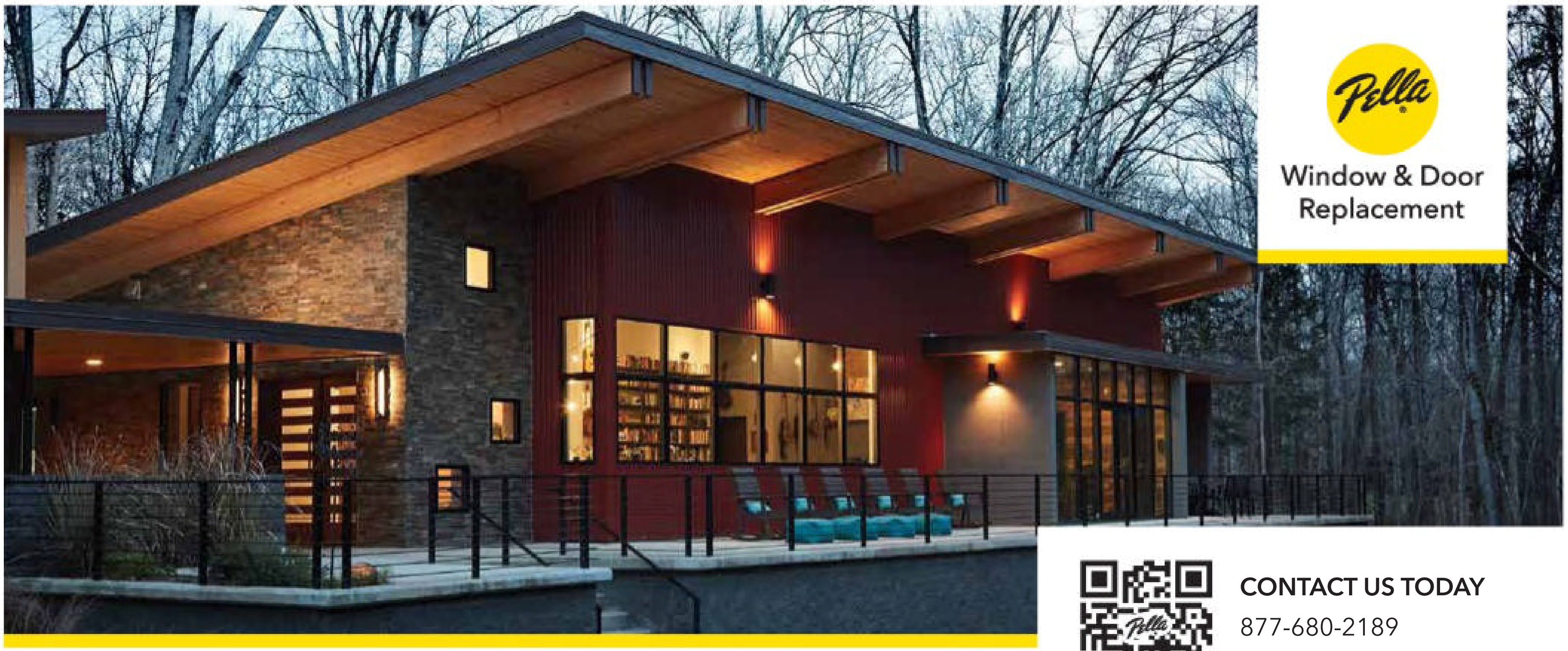


To the Rescue

In late winter 2022, five iced-in loons were rescued on Lake Champlain with the help of Nordic skaters who were touring nearby.

North Country weather has always been a wild ride of ups and downs, and climate change hasn't made it any easier to predict—just ask the loons. In recent years Dr. Nina Schoch, executive director of the Adirondack Center for Loon Conservation, has seen an uptick in loon rescues from iced-over lakes due to what she calls "molt-migration mismatch." Bigger lakes that used to ice up by late November or December are freezing later, she says, "so migrating birds see the open water and stop there." If they're still around in mid-January, when loons start losing their flight feathers, they get trapped if temperatures dip and the lake freezes around them.

Last year nine loons were rescued from Star Lake, Lake George and Lake Champlain—often with the help of what Schoch calls "impromptu volunteers," including ice fishermen, Nordic ice skaters and members of a fire department. The birds are netted, inspected for injuries and banded, then released on open waters. If you spot a loon that might be iced in, send the location and photos to info@adkloon.org. "Sometimes it's normal behavior," says Schoch. "Sometimes we go and monitor. We look at each situation individually."



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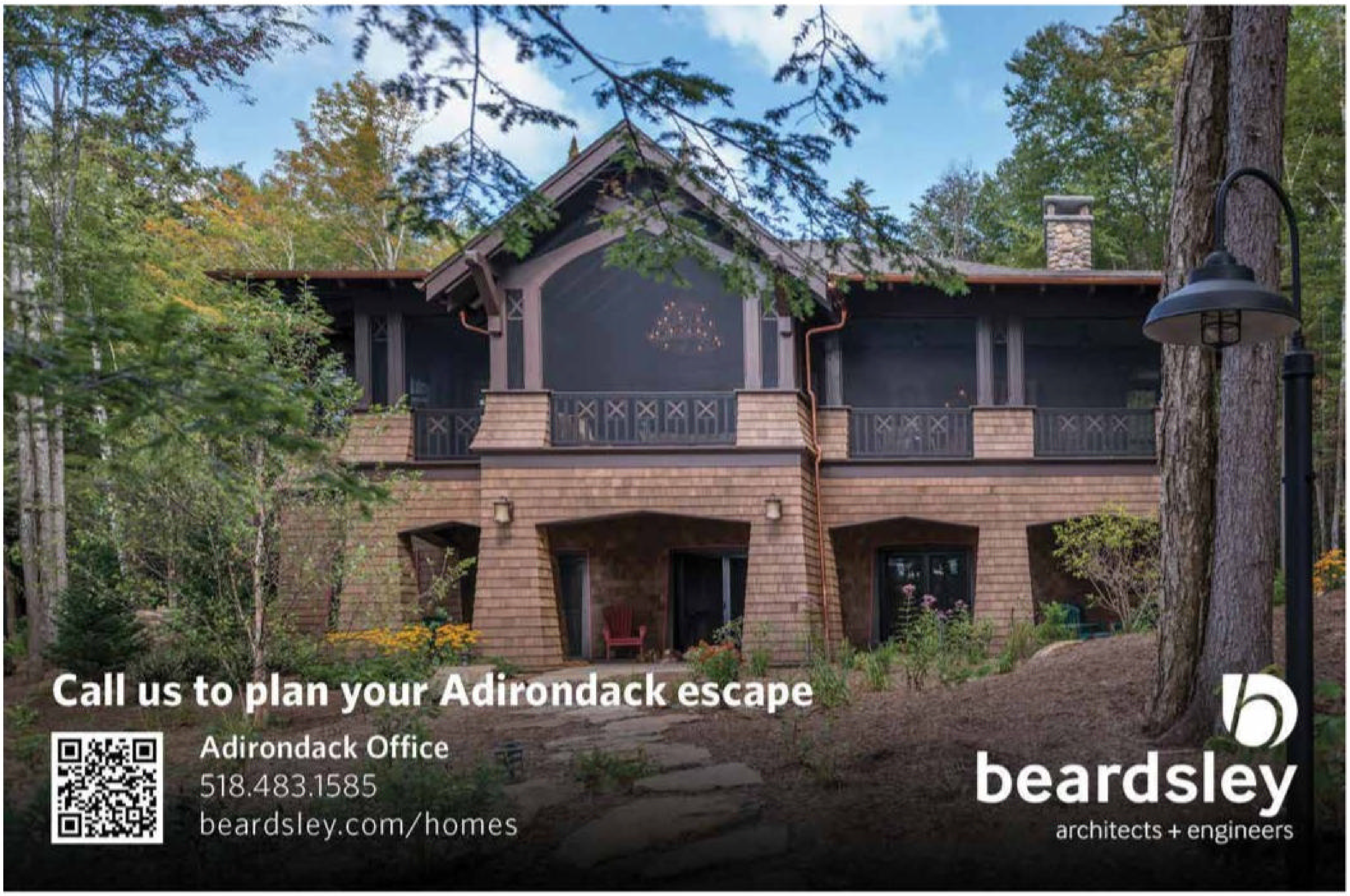

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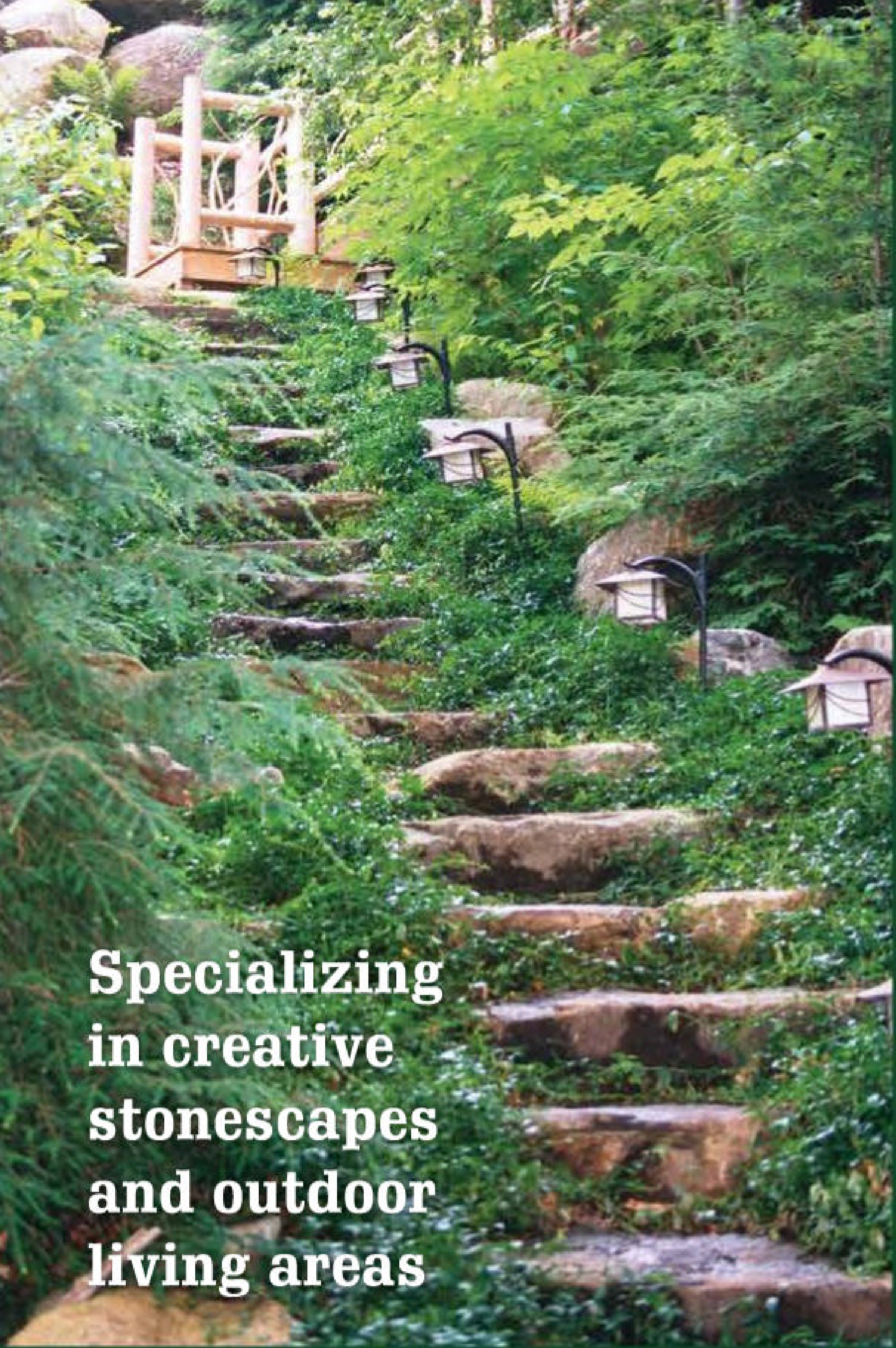

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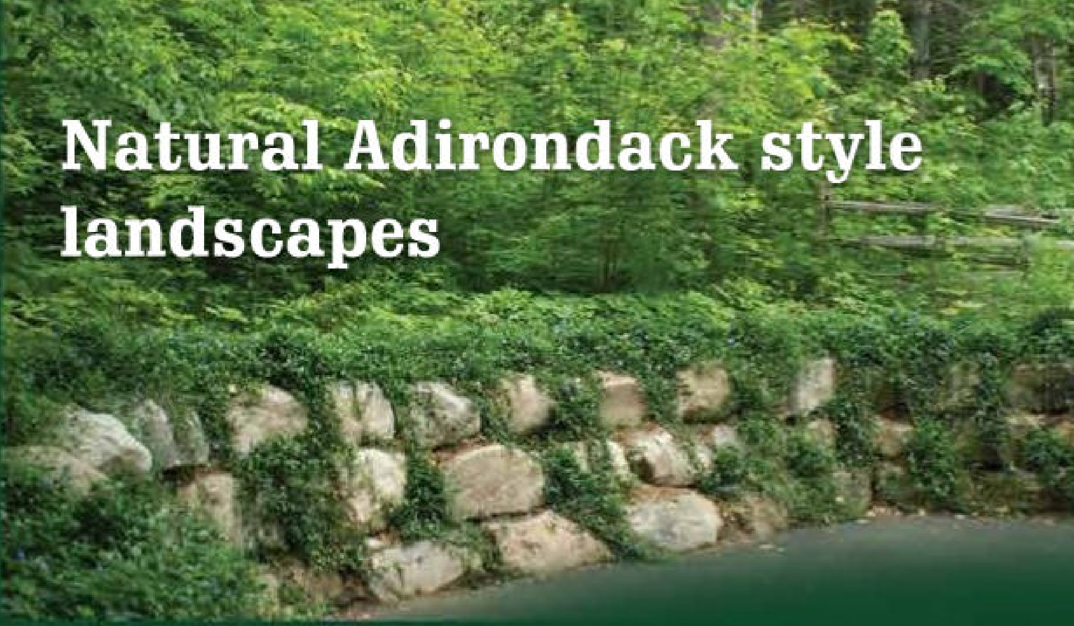

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Photograph courtesy of Elda Benedict Cook

Sick Days

A lifetime later, a patient remembers her care at Will Rogers Hospital

BY AURORA PFAFF

Elda Benedict Cook with a friend at Will Rogers Memorial Hospital, in Saranac Lake, where she convalesced from tuberculosis in the 1940s.

Elda Benedict Cook opened the door to her home, her oxygen tube trailing behind her, a reminder of the tubercular lung that was removed so very long ago. At 96 years old, she is full of charm, humor and fascinating memories. I arrived at her cozy log home in Hogansburg, along the St. Lawrence River, to learn about her past. As a young woman, Cook was treated for tuberculosis in Saranac Lake, not far from her childhood home, but it might as well have been the moon.

At her kitchen table, sun lighting her face, Cook spoke of a time in her life that must have included fear, pain and uncertainty, but she shared her memories with kindness and generosity.

The history of Saranac Lake is based on the tragedy of tuberculosis, a disease that has infected the globe for thousands of years. Exploring the village of Saranac Lake today, you notice houses with windowed porches, all of a similar vintage. Former cure cottages and sanatoria, these buildings serve as reminders of an era, from the 1880s to 1950s, when life in Saranac Lake centered around "taking the cure" of fresh mountain air that Dr. Edward Livingston Trudeau made famous when he first came here as a young man, sick with tuberculosis. You might still hear stories around town about when two o'clock to four o'clock was "quiet time" for the benefit of the patients. You can visit Trudeau's laboratory, now a museum and part of Historic Saranac Lake, which shares this village's rich history. While I worked as an oral history coordinator at Historic Saranac Lake I learned that patients came here from all over the world, but Elda Cook was the only Indigenous TB patient I had heard about. I wondered—and worried—about her experience here, if she had been treated differently.

Elda Benedict grew up in Hogansburg, a hamlet in Franklin County that borders the St. Regis Mohawk Territory. The youngest of seven, she and her family lived in a home overlooking the St. Regis River. Of her older sisters, she said it was like having five mothers. She attended the local Mohawk School, where her teacher was Ray Tehanetorens Fadden, who would go on to found Six Nations Indian Museum, in Onchiota. As a young woman, Elda moved to New York City, where there was opportunity. Living with her sister, Elda worked as a file clerk at the American Federation for the Blind. She rode the subway, met Helen Keller, and enrolled at City College. She wanted to be a nurse. One winter night in 1946, while listening to the radio, Elda vomited blood. Only 20 years old, she knew immediately that it was tuberculosis. X-rays showed advanced TB.

Though her doctor knew about sanatoria around the city, Elda didn't want to stay there.

One doctor spoke to another and, as she explained, "He said, 'Well, maybe we can get her into Will Rogers because he [Rogers] was of Native descent' and it worked! So they put me on the Pullman train and I rode up to Saranac Lake."

"Will Rogers" means the Will Rogers Memorial Hospital. Built in 1928, it was a sanatorium for vaudeville performers and was renamed as a tribute to Rogers after his death in 1935.

Rogers was a beloved entertainer who combined wry—and sly—political humor with a folksy, affable personality that was no act: he was a small-town cowboy from the Midwest who started out in circuses and on the vaudeville stage doing rope tricks. Through radio shows, newspaper columns and silent films, he appealed to rural families and urbanites alike, the sort of entertainer who could poke fun at the president to his face and make him laugh. He was also Cherokee, branding himself "The Cherokee Kid."

Rogers didn't fit the stereotypical mold of a Native American. He was a cowboy, upsetting the Old West depiction of good guys and bad guys. Yet Rogers was shaped by his childhood on the Cherokee Nation. At the time of his birth, he wasn't even considered American. Fortunately Rogers's Cherokee identity would make a difference for a young Mohawk woman.

Back in Hogansburg, Elda's parents didn't always have a car, so visits from family were infrequent. Still, she didn't recall being lonely or uncomfortable about being the only Native American patient at Will Rogers.

"I don't think it bothered me to be away from home," she continued. "Maybe because I was too ill, too weak. I only know that I was in bed."

Elda was bedridden for months, although friendship managed to find its way to her. She shared a bathroom with the young woman in the next room and the two would leave their connecting doors open, getting to know each other from their beds. "She was very sick. She was so nice, though."

When it was "safe" to get up and walk, Elda moved around more and enjoyed the dining room with its stage for entertainment—one patient, who would go

Neil Pelone

architecture

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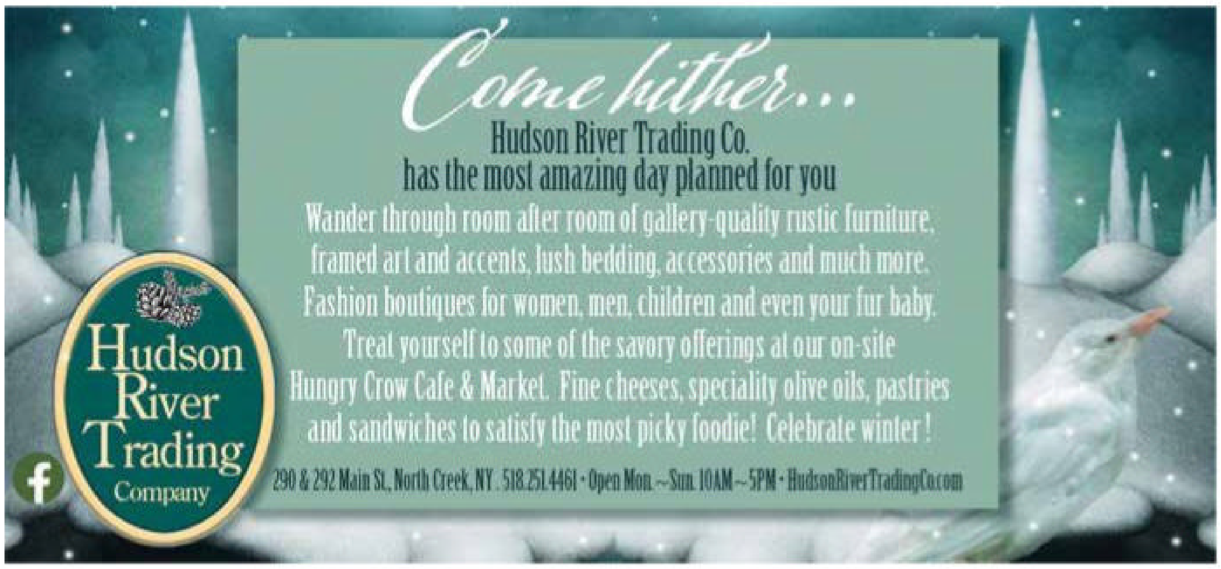

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on to star in *McHale's Navy*, put on magic shows as "The Amazing Mr. Ballantine." She made more friends. In an old album Elda has photographs from her time at Will Rogers. Pasted to the page are snapshots of her with healthy, round cheeks and a big smile.

In one photo, Elda stands with a man named George, the familiar façade of Will Rogers in the background. In another, she sits on the lawn, surrounded by grinning companions. There is camaraderie and joy in the photos, which surprised me. This must have been an often sad time, when so many people succumbed to the disease.

Elda recalled that George was a musician. Another friend was a doctor, and another always had a book in his hands. Elda's friend, the girl next door, passed away, but even after her death, her brother continued to visit. One time he took Elda to dinner.

After her stay at Will Rogers, Elda returned home and married a friend of her brother's, Julius Sakaronhio'keweh Cook. Married only three months, Elda once again fell ill, and this time she was sent to the state hospital at Ray Brook. It was during this stay that she saw more of Saranac Lake, where she, like other patients, would call Lezak's store for deliveries of small treats such as candy.

After another year and a half at Ray Brook, Elda went home for good. She and Julius raised two children, eventually settling in the house on the river. Julius was an ironworker who became a finely skilled silversmith, known for his dedication to sharing Indigenous philosophy through his art. Together, they lived a long and rich life.

Thinking back to those she met at Will Rogers, Elda said, "These people were all older than me, so they're probably all passed away now. I've been wanting to talk to somebody my age. It's hard, when you get this old, to know that everybody else is younger and sees things differently than you." But, she added, "it's good to dig up all these old memories."

The sun blazed through Elda's kitchen window and, outside, the St. Lawrence River flowed by.

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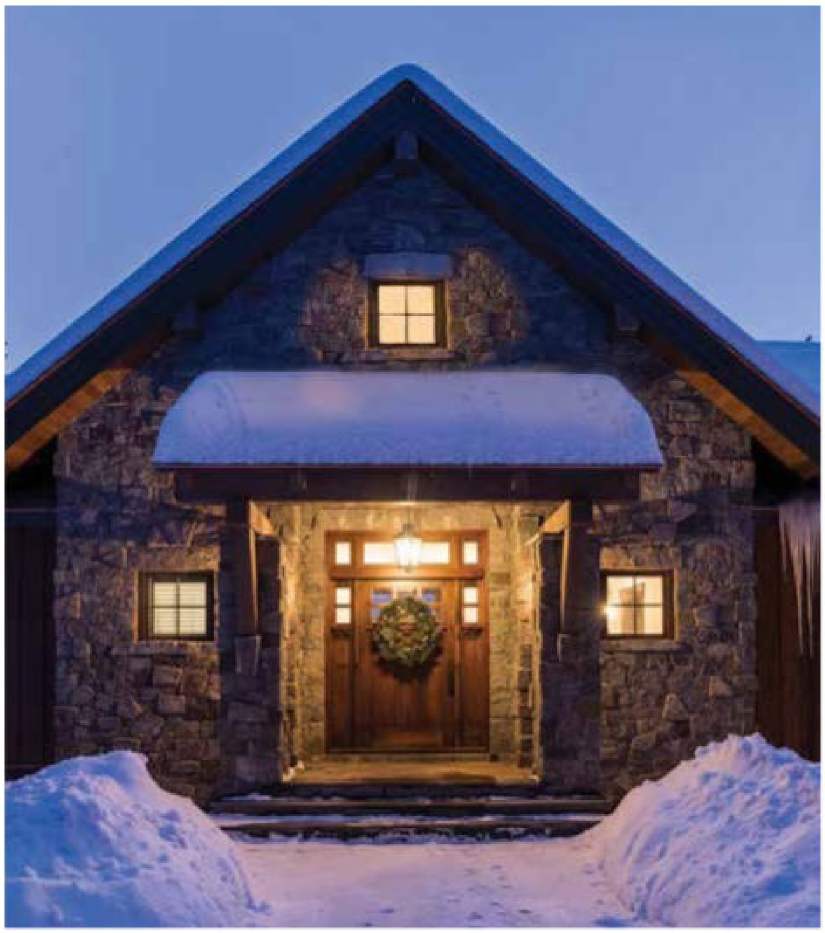

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Getting Loopy

Two trips from Adirondack Mountain Club's latest winter guide

BY TONY GOODWIN

The second edition of *Ski and Snowshoe Trails in the Adirondacks* offers 50 cold-weather adventures.

Botheration Pond Loop

Total distance: 7.2 mi (11.5 km)
Elevation change: Minimal
Difficulty: Ski, intermediate; snowshoe, novice
Map: TI 744: O21
GPS coordinates: 43.709386, -74.119033 (trailhead)

This loop offers a variety of interesting, but not too challenging, terrain as it passes two ponds and a large marsh with views of Gore Mt. The source of the unusual name apparently remains a mystery. The loop can also be combined with a point-to-point trip that finishes in North Creek via the Raymond Brook Ski Trail.

The best direction to ski this loop is clockwise. However, if there is any doubt about the safety of the river crossing, a counterclockwise direction would be indicated. If already headed counterclockwise and the crossing turns out to be too dangerous, it is best to turn back and find another trip in the area. Also, Botheration Pond is at about the halfway point on the loop going counterclockwise, so if ice conditions on the pond are not favorable, turning back there means not having to do a longer ski than planned.

Trailhead: The start is at the end of Old Farm Rd. To get there, turn onto Thirteenth Lake Rd., off NY 28 just N of North River. Signs for the Siamese Ponds Wilderness and Garnet Hill Lodge mark the turn. Follow signs to the Old Farm Trailhead. At 3.4 mi from NY 28, bear left at a junction and then bear right at the next two junctions, the second of which is Old Farm Rd. Reach a large parking area at the end of the plowed road.

From the parking lot, the East Branch Trail (blue markers) is flat for 0.1 mi to a kiosk and trail register. Going left on the

Botheration Pond Loop photograph by Nancie Battaglia, courtesy of Adirondack Mountain Club

Halfway Brook Trail (yellow markers), the trail is flat at first, but soon begins a moderate climb. At 0.8 mi, a side trail goes right to Balm of Gilead Mt. Continue straight. At 0.9 mi, another trail branches left toward Garnet Hill Lodge and the Hooper Mine, but the Botheration Pond Loop makes a sharp right and continues to climb to the W end of William Blake Pond at 1.3 mi. Take the marked trail left and up for a few yards before a descent to the east end of William Blake Pond. (Ice conditions permitting, it is possible to ski to the far end of William Blake Pond and easily climb up and left for a few yards to regain the marked trail.) The trail then climbs to an open marsh, with the summit of Gore Mt. just visible over a closer ridge. The easiest skiing is on the left side of the marsh, regaining the marked trail at the east end. Past the marsh, the gradual climbing continues to a height of land at 2.3 mi, followed by a moderate descent to a junction with the Botheration Pond Trail (red markers) at 2.6 mi. The loop continues to the right on the Botheration Pond Trail. (Continuing straight follows the Halfway Brook Trail out to Barton Mines Rd. and the Raymond Brook Trail to North Creek.) The Botheration Pond Trail is part of the North Country National Scenic Trail, which is also marked along this stretch.

Turning right at this junction, the trail descends in stages to the level of Botheration Pond and slowly draws closer to the shore, reaching it at 3.7 mi. At the outlet bridge, the trail swings away, and crosses the East Branch of the Sacandaga River at 3.9 mi.

The trail now descends a series of moderate grades on a side hill to the second crossing of the river at 5 mi. Most winters, an ice bridge forms here that skiers and snowshoers can cross; however, take the usual precautions when crossing frozen waterways. Past the river, the trail climbs gradually, levels off, and then descends gently to a junction with the East Branch Trail at 6 mi. Turning right at this junction, the trail is mostly flat leading to another junction with a side trail to Elizabeth Point on Thirteenth Lake at 6.6 mi. (This trail descends gradually at first, but steepens

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before reaching the point and its views of the lake at 0.3 mi.) Going straight at this junction, the trail remains mostly flat back to the parking area at 7.2 mi.

John Pond–Clear Pond Loop

Round-trip: 4.6 mi (7.4 km) to John Pond
Total distance: 4.7 mi (7.5 km) full loop including Clear Pond
Difficulty: Ski, novice to John Pond; intermediate for full loop; snowshoe, beginner
Map: TI 744: P19
GPS coordinates: 43.733793, -74.219966 (trailhead)

Combining attractive destinations with easy to moderate terrain, this trip has become quite popular, especially with the addition of the trail connecting John Pond and Clear Pond to make a loop. While not all that difficult in either direction, the DEC laid out the loop to be skied clockwise, which has skiers ascending from Clear Pond to the top of the ridge between the two ponds. Going counterclockwise, however, avoids some short, steep downhill pitches on the connection between the two ponds. The ski to John Pond can be done with less than a foot of snow, but the full loop needs more than that because of some rougher terrain between Clear Pond and the trailhead.

Trailhead: The start for this trip is SE of the hamlet of Indian Lake. From the intersection of NY 28 and NY 30 in Indian Lake, proceed S on NY 30 for 0.6 mi and turn left onto Big Brook Rd. Go 3.3 mi to Starbuck Rd. Turn left, go 0.4 mi and bear left again onto Lake View Dr. Proceed 0.5 mi to a T intersection. This is the summer trailhead for Clear Pond and a possible start for snowshoers going just to Clear Pond. Skiers and those headed for John Pond should go right at this T intersection. It is 0.2 mi to the end of plowing. There is no parking at the snowplow turnaround, but parking on the shoulder just short of the turnaround is permitted. (Coming from the E on NY 28, one can also reach Big Brook Rd. by turning left onto Chamberlain Rd. [County Route 18] at the top of a long hill, 1 mi W of the sign marking the Indian Lake town line.)

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From the snowplow turnaround, the trail is flat for about 150 yd to a junction with a trail left marked with yellow ski trail disks. This is the start of the Clear Pond loop if skied clockwise, or the finish to the loop if skied counterclockwise.

(If skied clockwise by going left here, there is a gradual climb to the junction with the summer start at 0.3 mi and then to Clear Pond at 1.3 mi. The trail then climbs away from Clear Pond along a side hill, crests two low ridges, and descends to the John Pond Trail at 2.4 mi. From here, it is another 2.2 mi back to the trailhead.)

Continuing past this trail to the left, the summer trailhead and register are 0.1 mi beyond. From here, the trail is gently rolling for 0.7 mi to a sharp left turn, where it begins to climb in generally easy stages. At 1.7 mi, a side trail left leads to the burial ground of Peter Savary and Eliza Emilia King, two children of early settlers who died of diphtheria in 1897.

At 1.9 mi, the John Pond Crossover Trail goes to the right. (This is a very skiable trail to Puffer Pond and Kings Flow.) Continuing straight at this junction, the trail rises in several easy pitches to another junction at 2.2 mi. Here, the yellow markers go right toward Clear Pond, while red markers lead left to John Pond and its lean-to at 2.3 mi.

Turning right at the junction at 2.3 mi, the loop trail climbs over one ridge, briefly descends, and then climbs in a series of short, steep pitches to the top of a higher ridge. From here, the trail swings left and descends on a side hill to Clear Pond at 3.2 mi. The trail now follows the shore of the pond for 0.1 mi to a junction with a trail leading right to the outlet of the pond. Turning left, the trail climbs for a few yards, followed by a delightful run (assuming more than a foot of snow) along a side hill to flatter going and the junction with the marked ski trail at 4.1 mi. Going left, continued easy descents lead back to the John Pond trailhead at 4.7 mi.

***Ski and Snowshoe Trails in the Adirondacks* (Adirondack Mountain Club, second edition) is available at adk.org.**

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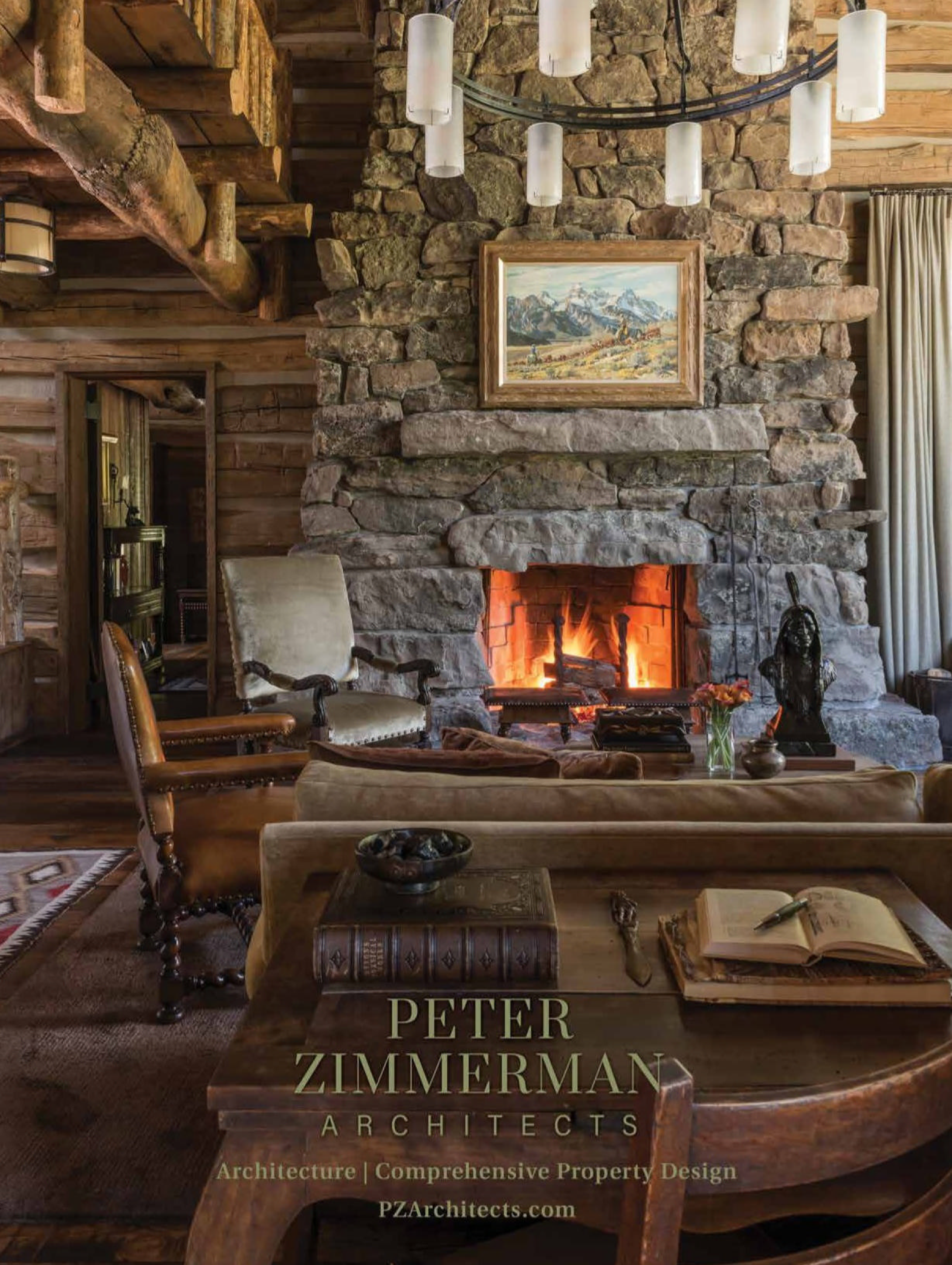

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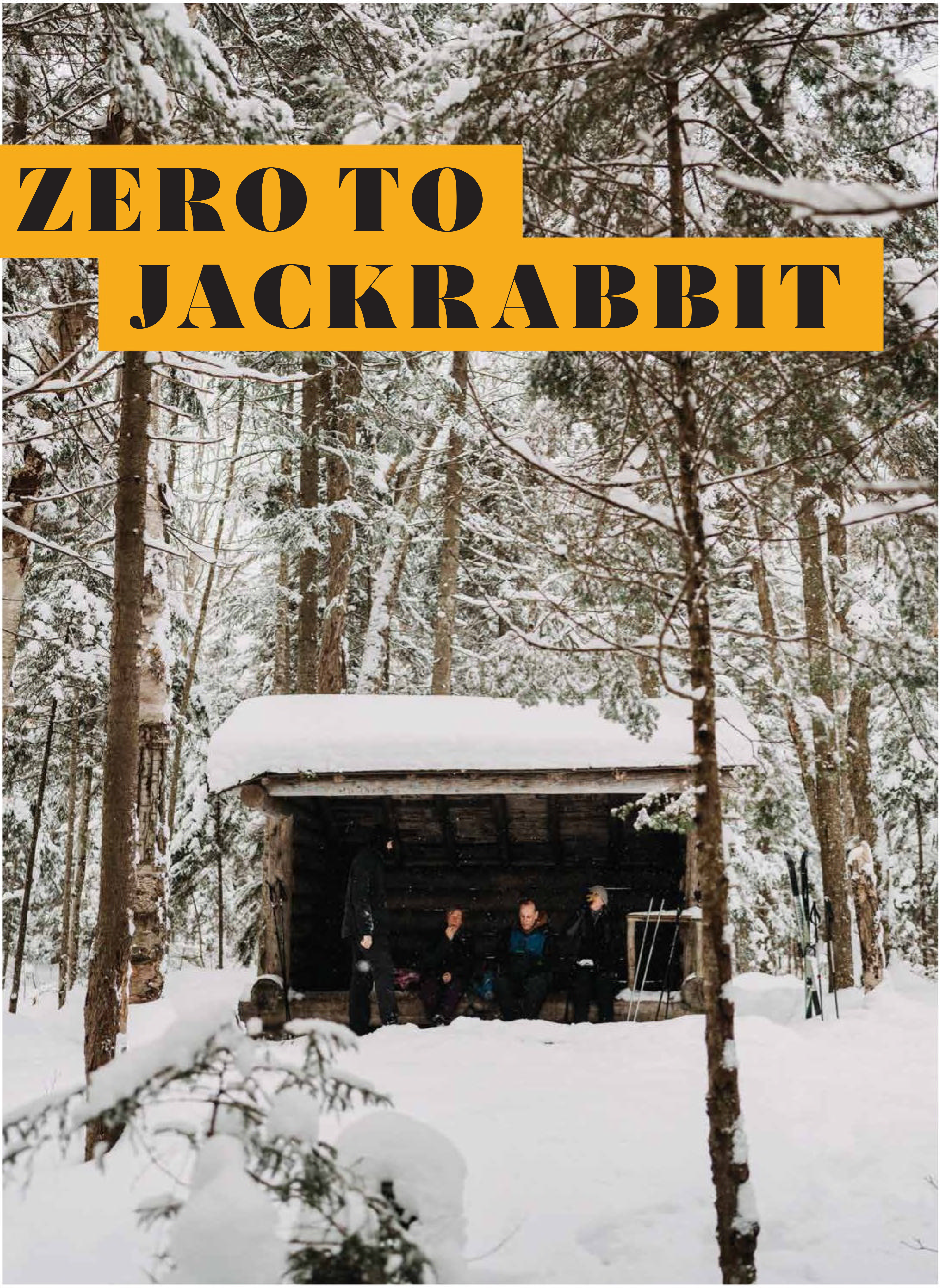

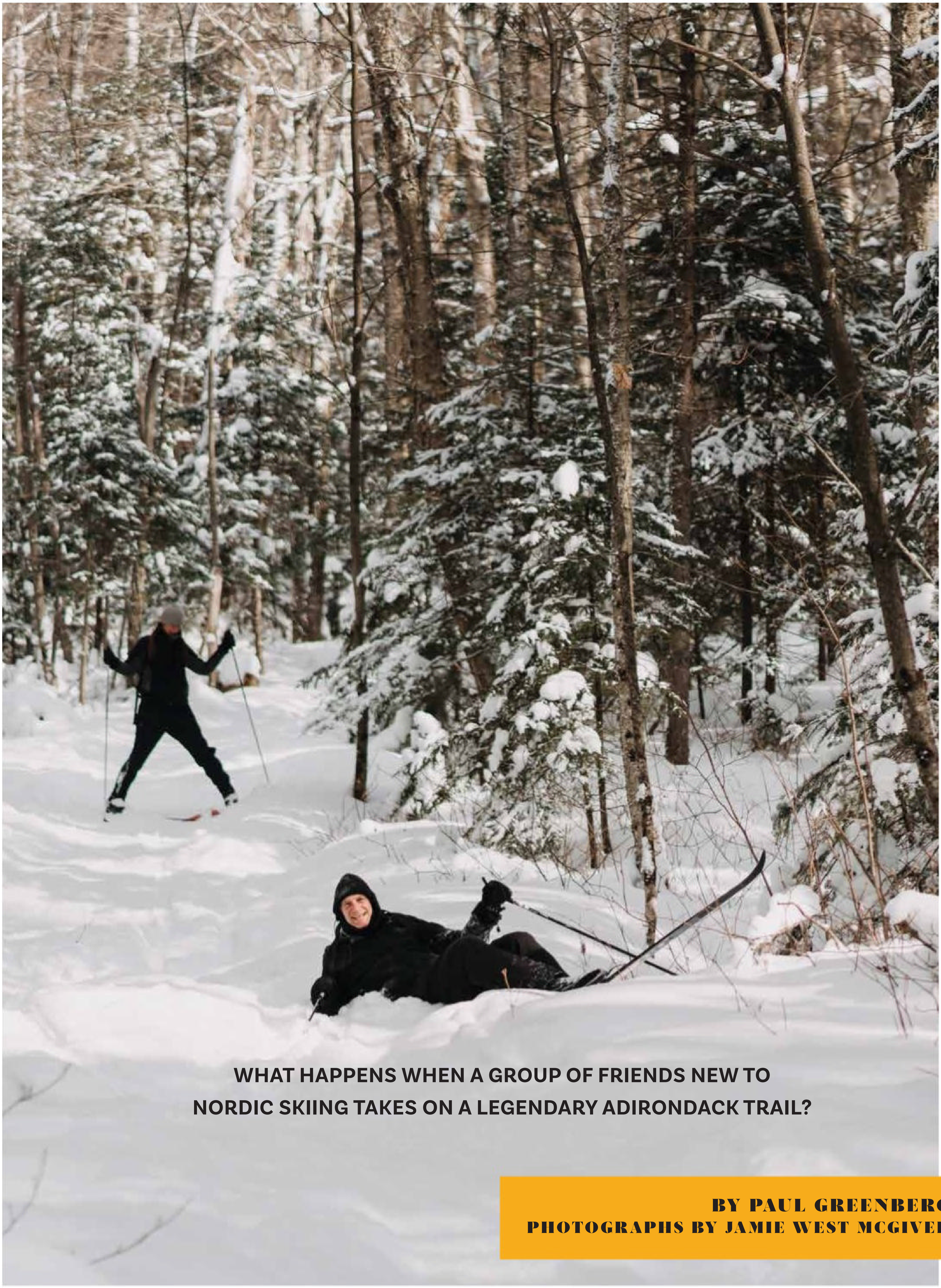

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A GROUP OF FRIENDS NEW TO NORDIC SKIING TAKES ON A LEGENDARY ADIRONDACK TRAIL?

BY PAUL GREENBERG

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JAMIE WEST MCGIVER

LET'S SAY YOU'RE NEARING A SIGNIFICANT BIRTHDAY.

Let's say you're turning 55. And let's say you have a group of friends circling the same drain. Let's also put it out there that this group is pretty game. They like to do things. They welcome a challenge. Not marathon runners, but not the types who are ready to settle in for cards and cookies. Now, on top of that, let's say it's deep winter. And let's add the fact that some of these 50-somethings have kids and spouses who are tolerant of adventures that only last so long.

What could you do to unify all these themes into a relatively short and invigorating tussle with the elements? What challenge could you present that tricky knees and rising blood pressure could overcome? What would get the spirit racing toward a goal while also providing opportunity for a comfortable bed at day's end?

I suggest cross-country skiing the Jackrabbit Trail. Stretching 33 miles from Paul Smiths to Keene, the Jackrabbit rises and falls in typical Adirondack fashion. It's got plenty of flat, too, and is conveniently punctuated by wholesome lodging and dining in Lake Clear, Saranac Lake, Lake Placid and Keene.

This is just the adventure I proposed to my New York City friends Sean, David, Jenny and Sarah. Each had in their own way hit a life pause. Sean had just ghostwritten a celebrity autobiography. David, who leads a democracy organization, was dreading an impending empty nest. Jenny had just closed on an apartment in Brooklyn. Sarah was wrapping a documentary about nurturing healthy gut bacteria.

Miraculously, all of us were free for an extended long weekend in January. Equally miraculously, snow, glorious snow, had fallen in abundance, coating the trail from end-to-end in thick powder. When we rendezvoused at Lake Placid's Cascade Ski Center last winter to rent our equipment, we caught snowflakes on our tongues and jumped about.

The only problem was that most of us didn't really know how to cross-country ski.

THE JACKRABBIT TRAIL is named after Herman Smith "Jackrabbit" Johannsen, a Norwegian born in 1875 who emigrated to North America at the turn of the century and broke hundreds of miles of trail throughout the Adirondacks and Quebec. For Jackrabbit, 55 was only the midpoint—the age at which he sloughed off a humdrum career as an engineer and made the next 55 years all about skiing. In *The Legendary Jackrabbit Johannsen*, the biography his daughter wrote, there's nary a mention of Jackrabbit actually learning how to ski. One has the impression he schussed right out of the womb.

We New Yorkers were not so fortunate. To start us off I booked a lesson at Cascade with longtime Adirondack guide and ski instructor Terry Watson. Terry was familiar with the problem of downhillers attempting cross-country. As we geared up, he told us about a friend who'd been on the Olympic ski team who always scoffed at Nordic. "So, one day I brought him out and sent him down a hill," Terry laughed. "Poles, goggles, gloves everywhere. Total yard sale."

Terry explained that for the Jackrabbit Trail, it would be all about trying to get as efficient as possible. "You shouldn't rely on the force from your upper body," he explained. "It's the engaging

JACKRABBIT TRAIL
KEENE LAKE PLACID SARANAC LAKE PAUL SMITHS
The Jackrabbit Ski Trail

Above: **The author after an epic "yard sale."** Facing page and pages 26–27: **Five friends explore the beauty and adventure of the legendary 33-mile Jackrabbit Trail.**

SARAH'S "LAPIN A LA JACKRABBIT"

INGREDIENTS:

3.5 pounds rabbit
2 tablespoons olive oil
2–3 slices bacon, coarsely chopped
4 cloves of garlic, peeled
Salt and pepper, to taste
8 fresh thyme sprigs
1 cup chicken or vegetable stock
2 cups good red wine
Mushrooms or shallots, optional

DIRECTIONS:

Slosh olive oil into a casserole pot, ideally thick-bottomed. Add bacon and cook a few minutes over medium heat. Add mushrooms and shallots, if using, with garlic and stir with a wooden spoon.

Pat bunny dry and season with salt and pepper. Put into the pot to sear, a few minutes each side. Add extra oil if necessary or turn down the heat so bacon and garlic don't burn.

Add thyme, stock and red wine. Make sure rabbit is mostly submerged in the liquid. Cook covered at medium low heat about 50 minutes. Remove the lid and cook another 20–30 minutes. Meat will fall off the bone when done (beware of sharp little bones).

Serve with crusty French bread or roasted potatoes.

of the thigh and the slide that saves energy. A longer, slower stride with opposite arm matching the stroke of opposite leg is the most efficient. And then that transition from glide to climb should happen only when it's truly necessary. Also, the poles should never be in front but almost dragging behind. I can always tell when someone's been using the wrong arm motions. They come into the lodge and can barely get a 16-ounce lager to their lips."

Flat and uphill explained, we then turned to everybody's terror: downhill. "It's not just a simple pizza wedge," Terry continued atop a suitable slope. "There's actually an uphill ski and a downhill ski. The downhill ski is loaded or weighted until the turn is finished and then unweighted, letting it become the uphill ski."

One by one we gave it a go with Terry issuing grades afterwards. Jenny, the Harvard grad of Scandinavian descent, got an A+. David, Sarah and I got Bs. Sean—yard sale.

Lessons learned, we made our way to our lodgings at White Pine Camp, in Paul Smiths—a turn-of-the-last century cluster of cabins where President Calvin Coolidge once stayed, making it his "Summer White House." Over a carbo-loading Bolognese dinner we tried to get it all straight.

"That part where you're supposed to move your arms opposite to the skis, is both the most important thing and something I would prefer not to know," said David. "Because if you think about it, you'll mess it up. It's like you need some kind of Zen-master quality where you understand it without really understanding it."

"It was just an overwhelming amount of information and I don't know whether I retained any of it," Sean said. He then changed into a flowing robe and made his way to the cottage's massive clawfoot tub. "I have to process all this," he said. "I'm taking a Coolidge."

PEOPLE COME AT THE Jackrabbit in different ways. Some ski bits and pieces and bag the entire trail's length over the course of a winter. Some ski the whole thing in a single calendar day, starting and finishing under the cover of darkness. But for a group with minimal skills and a week or less of vacation time, a reasonable compromise can be struck by breaking up the trail into more or less consecutive seven- to 10-mile chunks per day. Developing a logistical plan for those chunks can require some advance strategizing. There is no hut-to-hut system along the Jackrabbit. Nor is there much in the way of affordable guiding infrastructure that would help you schlep your gear from one leg to the next.

Seeing as the forecast was for temperatures in the single digits, plus the fact that none of us was ski-stable enough to carry heavy packs for miles at a time, we opted to make White Pine Camp and its Coolidge tub our permanent base and use our two cars to stage at either end of each chunk.

With our new, semi-acquired Terry Watson skills, we set out near Paul Smith's Visitor Interpretive Center and immediately dove into a trail straight out of a Grimm fairy tale. Frosted trees, curvy glades with enough short uphills and downhills to test the important "transition" from gliding to climbing and back to gliding. Surprisingly, no one fell through the first two miles of difficult terrain and we congratulated ourselves when we took a pause for a water break. Seconds later David's skis slipped out from under him and flipped him onto his back. Yard sale.

On we pressed to flatter open ground. A third of the way to our destination Sean, as the least experienced of our underexperienced lot, realized there was no shame in turning around. After he left, we grew silent as each of us focused on trying to perfect the opposite-arm/leg-thigh-driving we all knew was the ideal. And then all of a sudden there was the ideal itself, swishing toward us. It was someone I knew—photographer Nancie Battaglia, who prided herself on squeezing in the maximal number of ski-days in a single season. Last year's tally was 170.

"You heading to Charlie's Inn?" she asked as we met at the intersection of ski and snowmobile tracks. "Follow me, I know a better way."

Avoiding snowmobiles and the ice-encrusted ruts they leave can be one of the hazards of the western part of the Jackrabbit. Charlie's Inn, a honky-tonk snowmobilers' lair where Terry Watson told me the original Charlie had once kicked out a bunch of cross-country skiers for ordering nothing but hot water for their tea, seemed to be defended by miles of snowmobile trench. It was therefore a great relief to follow Nancie through an undisturbed glade of massive trees and schuss in total silence. Kick glide, kick glide. Nancie had it down. And before long, Charlie's popped into sight and we traded in our skis for barstools.

Sean was there at the bar translating Pirandello and drinking an imported lager. The rest of us ordered "kicking crab" chowder. The rest of us that is, save Sarah. Through the corner of my eye, I spied her with one of her own tea bags in a cup about to motion to the bartender for some hot water. "Don't do it!" I shouted.

Sated and laughing, we left Charlie's patting our backs for a largely upright day with no injuries. As we made for the car, the hasps of my ski boots caught one another, locking my feet in place and causing me to plunge forward flat onto my face.

Total yard sale.

HOW FAR CAN WE GO before we fall? Or, more importantly, how many times can we fall before we can no longer get up again? Jackrabbit Johannsen fell and rose again and again throughout his century on the planet. Wiped out in the Great Depression, he left the New York suburbs, moved to the Lake Placid Club, did test runs to figure out the best routes for the '32 Olympics, decamped to Montreal and built ski jumps and laid trail well into his 80s. At 94 he worked his way across the Atlantic on a freighter ship, braiding rope to earn his passage. He finally succumbed when he caught a cold while visiting his native Norway. He died in 1987 at the age of 111 in the arms of his octogenarian son.

In spite of his noble example, doubts | *Continued on page 56*

IF YOU GO

Fitness

For me, skiing the Jackrabbit Trail, while not requiring marathon-level fitness, necessitated training and planning.

Cardiovascular and core fitness as well as joint health and flexibility are key to a good cross-country-ski trip. If you don't have access to skis, build up to a 5K run or a vigorous 20K bike ride on mixed terrain at least a month in advance. Stretch daily and do a circuit of core exercises at least three times a week.

Cars and Gear

Unless you're planning to carry your gear yourself from leg to leg, you'll want two cars that can accommodate your entire party and their gear in order to "stage" your daily runs.

For equipment you'll want backcountry skis with metal edges, so you can herringbone up steep hills on icy days. Skis, boots and poles can be rented from the Adirondack Mountain Club's Cascade Welcome Center (www.adk.org), in Lake Placid. Group package rates are available. Be sure to book rentals in advance, particularly if someone has an atypical shoe size.

Check the Barkeater Trails Alliance's website, betatrails.org, for Jackrabbit's trail conditions. Make sure you have a comfortable day pack that can hold lunch and the extra clothing you'll doff and don throughout the day. Don't forget a thermos for hot soup or a beverage. An iPhone with an external charger is important for safety as well as a Green Goat Map (greengoatmaps.com) of the Jackrabbit Trail.

Clothing

In an era of climate change you never know if it's going to be balmy or brutal. Safety demands that you plan for brutal. Multiple layers of long underwear are a must, as is good, waterproof outerwear that includes gaiters to slip over your ski boots. An emergency down parka that you'll mostly carry is also a good idea. Glove liners and good mittens are needed as well as hand and foot warmers. Hats are obligatory, and if you're worried about falling, a ski helmet isn't a bad idea.

Lodging

If you're looking for a base of operations, White Pine Camp (www.whitepinecamp.com), in Paul Smiths, has classic Adirondack-style cabins that can accommodate groups. If you're aiming for a hut-to-hut approach, you could lodge your next stage at Charlie's Inn (518-891-9858), in Lake Clear, which has a restaurant onsite. Heading east, Lake Placid Lodge (518-523-2700), off the trail in Lake Placid, could be good for a splurge after what will be your hardest day. Then, after the big descent, there's Cascade Center with its affordable bunk rooms and cozy restaurant, or Rock and River, in Keene, which has two Adirondack-style lodges—also great for groups—just off the Jackrabbit Trail. —*P. G.*

THE ART

PHOTO MANIPULATION HAS BEEN HAPPENING LONGER THAN YOU THINK

BY SALLY E. SVENSON

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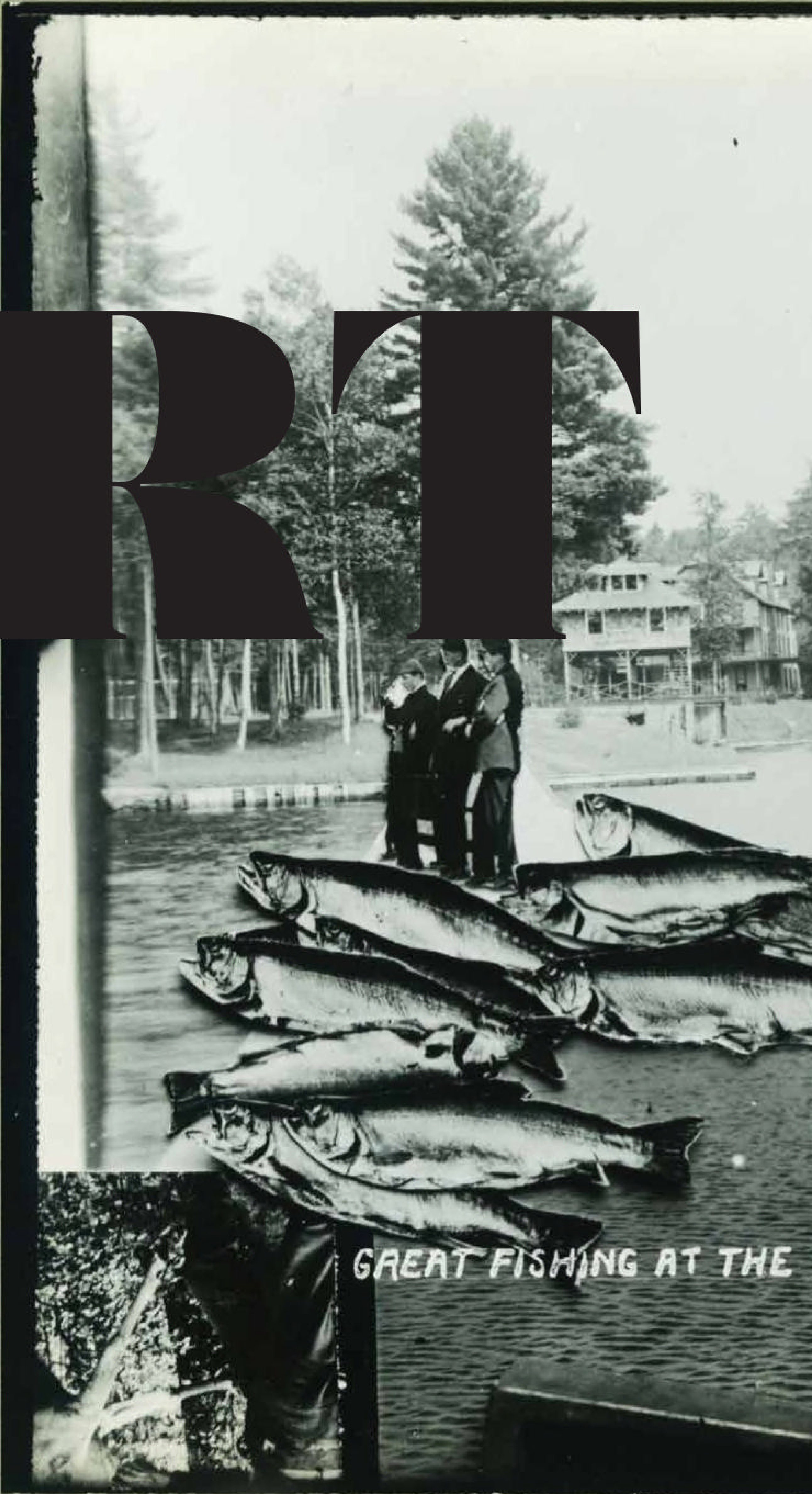
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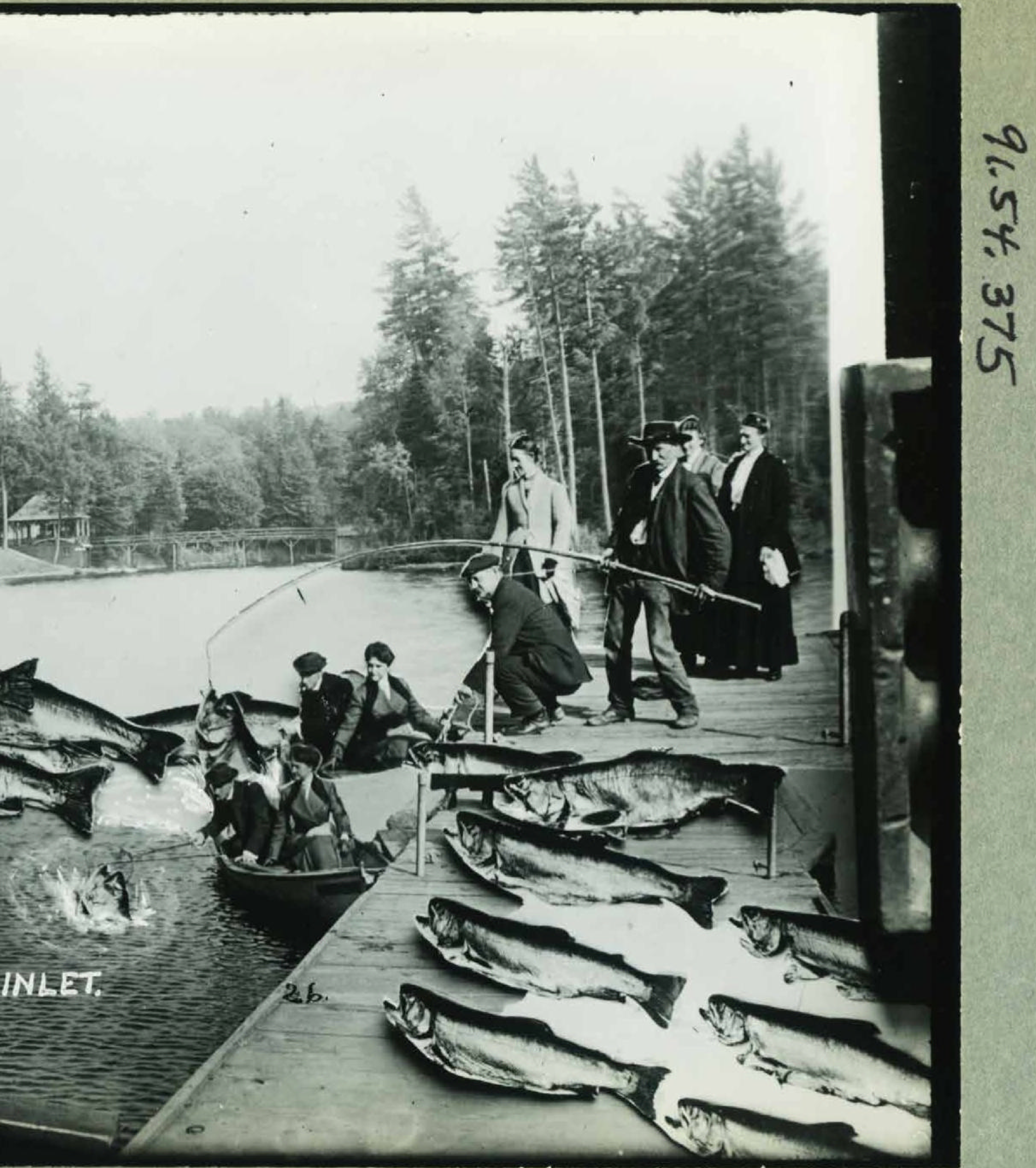
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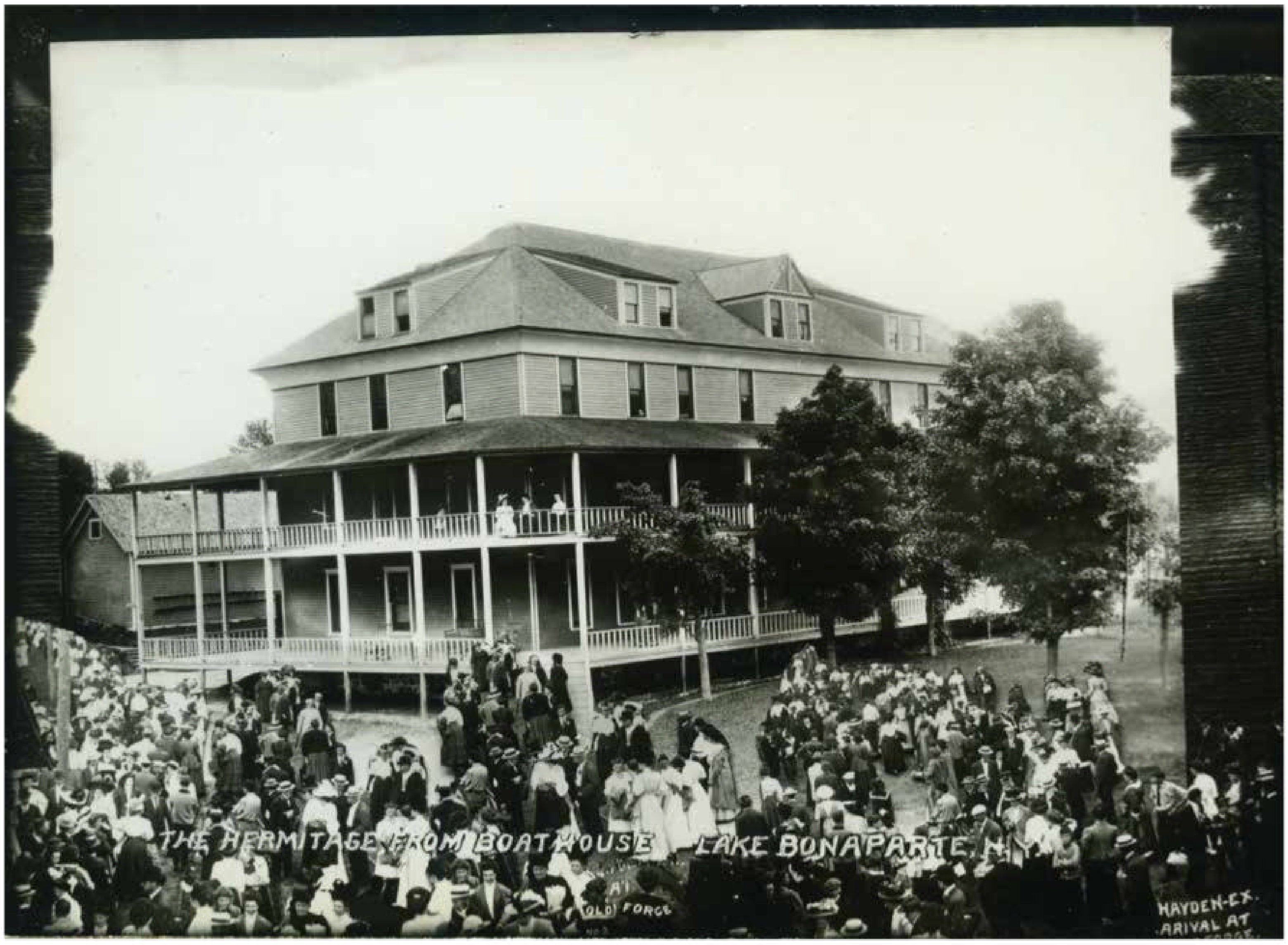
OF DECEPTION

THE FIRST VERSION OF PHOTOSHOP WAS ISSUED IN 1990, but the art and craft of manipulating photographs has existed since the invention of photography. Two or more images might be captured on the same negative. A man's mustache or beard might be trimmed or a woman outfitted with earrings on negatives with a fine paintbrush. The cheeks of tintype portraits might be dabbed with a touch of blush. Photographs were manipulated for political or ideological reasons. Sometimes doctored versions were contrived just for fun.

OBSERVATION POINT, LAKE BONAPA

Henry M. Beach (1863–1943), a provincial with roots in Watson, Lewis County, was one of the Adirondacks' most prolific photographers. Real photo postcards (real photographs printed on postcard stock) were his principal stock-in-trade. These cards were popular between 1900 and World War I and were the purview of photographers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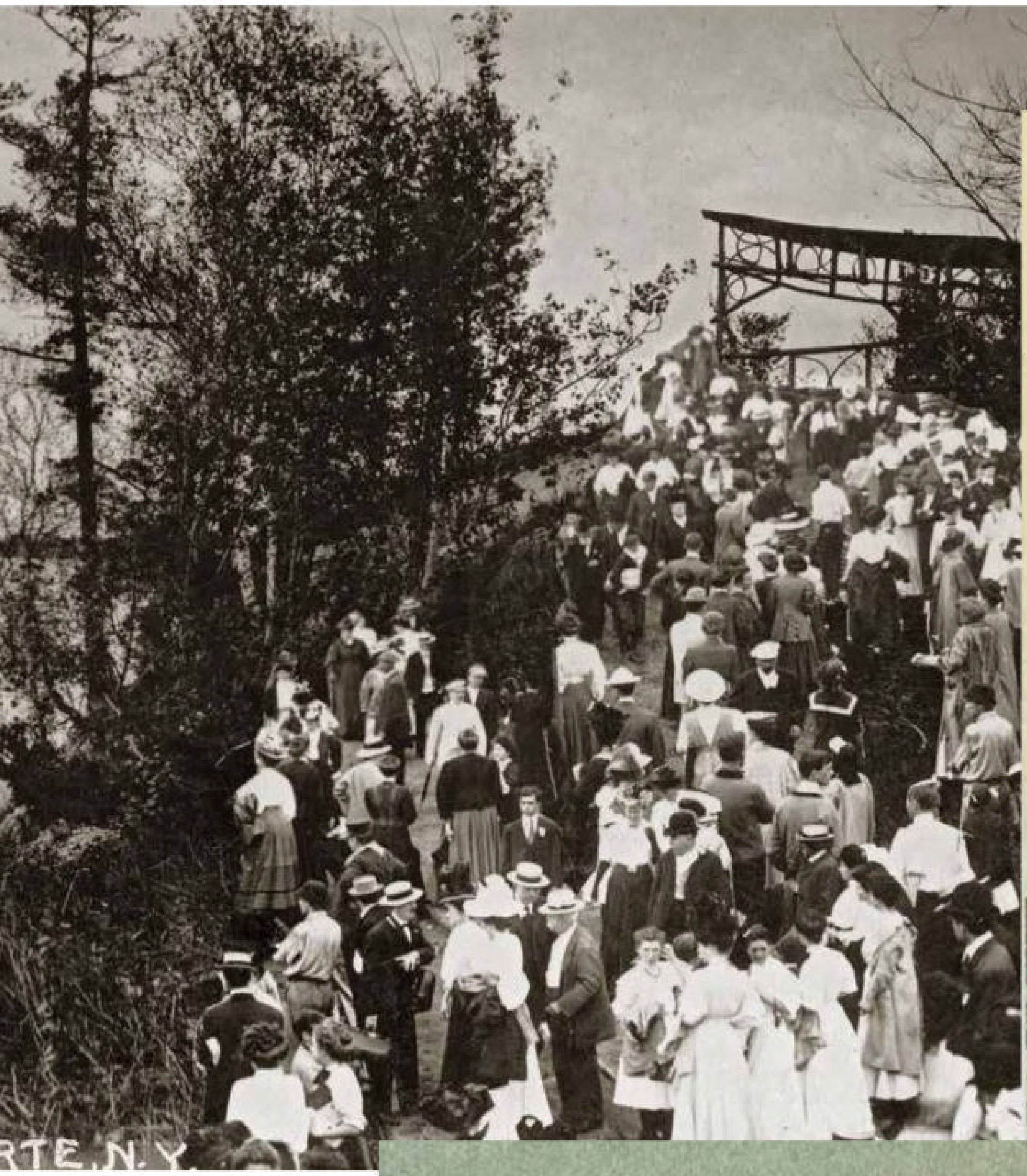
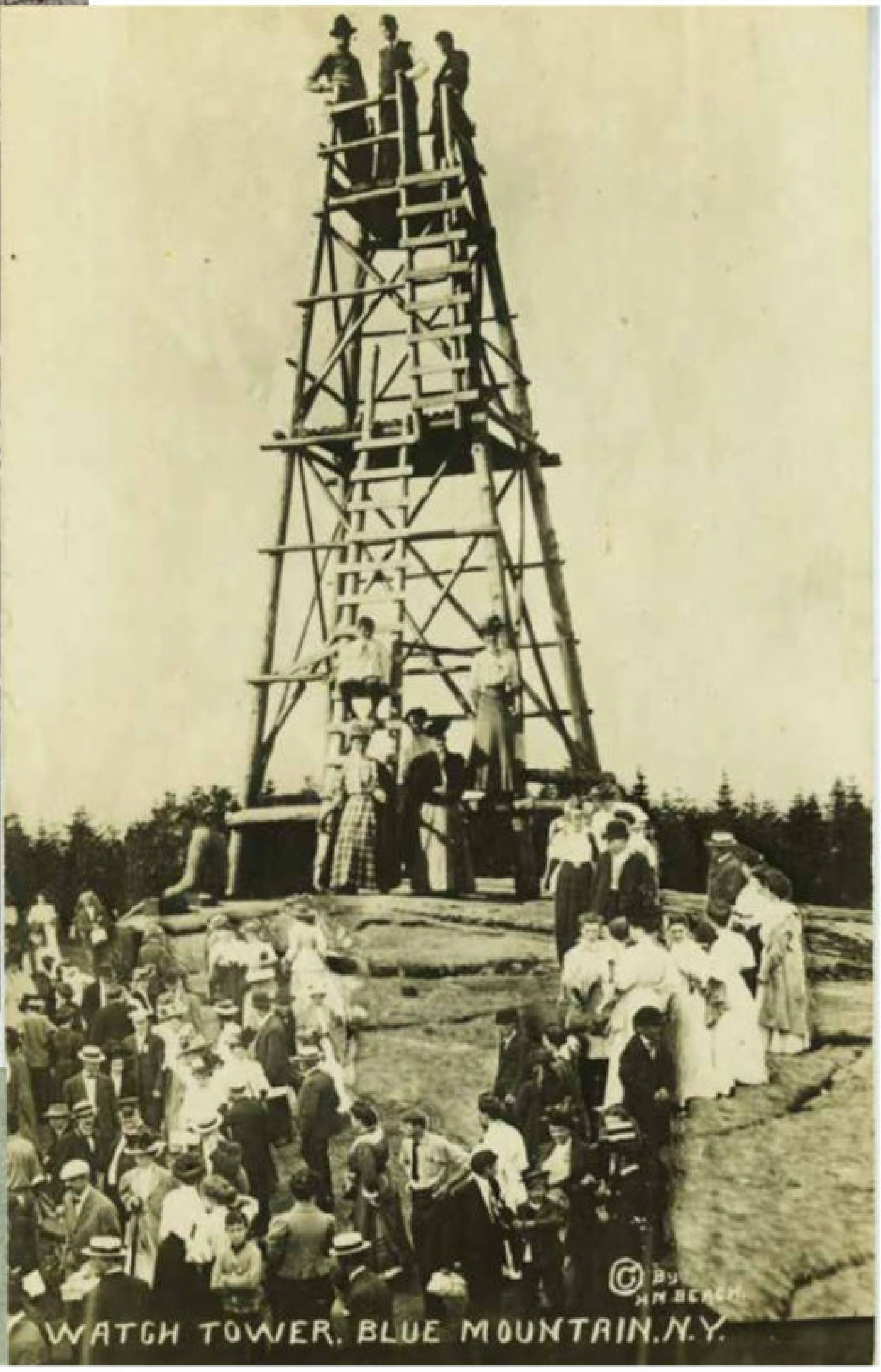
ARIVAL AT

Observation Point photograph courtesy of Sally Svenson. All other photographs from Adirondack Experience




© By
H M BEACH
WATCH TOWER, BLUE MOUNTAIN, N.Y.

Henry Beach added crowd scenes to Adirondack landscapes for "tall-tale" postcards. Can you spot the repeated group of women in white? Pages 32–33: **Beach-imagined fish story from Inlet.**

who covered lightly peopled regions, those that held little allure for commercial postcard operators catering to large markets. Documenting the visual minutiae of otherwise unchronicled local districts, they constitute a bona fide genre of American folk art.

Beach published thousands of real photo postcards, often in print runs of no more than a hundred cards. He is recognized as the only early Adirondack photographer to have employed his talents at manipulating images. Using previously captured view photographs along with print letters, maps, calendar pages and artificial flowers, he laid out montages on flat surfaces, many of them advertisements for his own or others' businesses, then re-photographed them to create new images. He also crafted amusing amalgams with no basis in reality by superimposing over-scaled photographic cutouts on single-image exterior backgrounds. Known as "exaggeration," "freak" or "tall-tale" postcards, these represent an intriguing subgenre of real photo postcards.

While exaggeration photo artists in other parts of the country played with depictions of giant ears of corn or hulking hogs and chickens, Beach's repertory of fake photographic props was drawn from subjects common to the Adirondacks: supersized fish, approachable bears, immense logs. He also fashioned a number of crowd scenes, filling village and open landscapes with people and vehicles. Most of his tall-tale representations were intentionally crude, designed to provoke belly laughs. But a few were subtle; you could almost believe the camera had recorded real situations.

The three Beach postcards on these pages fall into the latter category. Modeled with a stock array of single-person and small-group cutouts laid onto regional views, these heavily peopled scenes were meticulously composed. Gradations in the size of cutout figures enabled Beach to capture perspective in a convincing manner. Only one detail in these images gives his game away: the repeated cluster of young women in white dresses—suitably attired to populate a variety of settings—among the throng in the fore- or middle ground of each.

Svenson's book *Adirondack Photographers, 1850–1950* (Syracuse University Press), a biographical dictionary of the region's photographers, will be published May 2023.

Finding *Your* Roots

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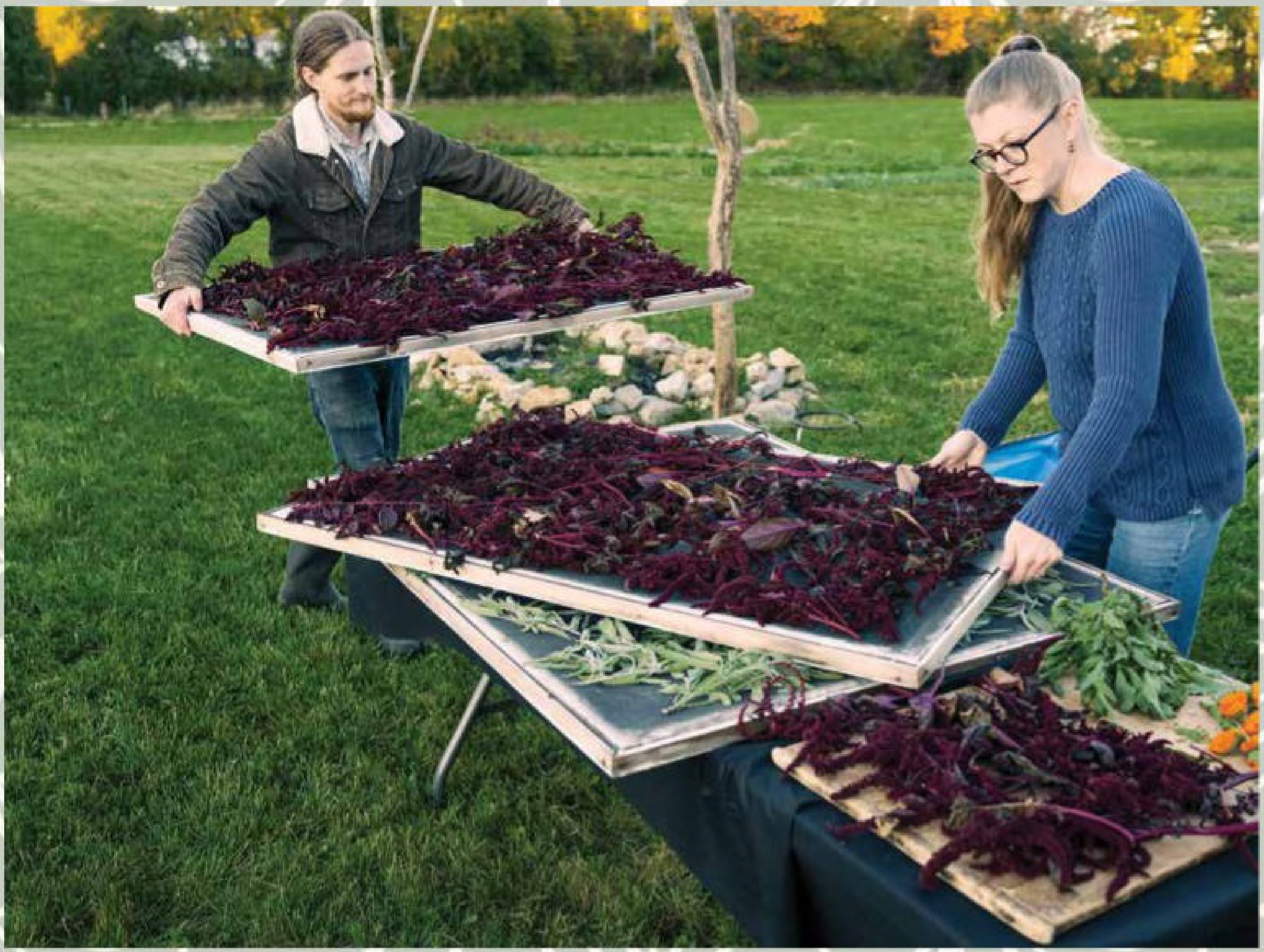
THANKFUL SAGE FARM SCHOOL BRINGS FOLK WISDOM TO A NEW GENERATION

BY JANELLE A. SCHWARTZ

PHOTOGRAPHS BY BEN STECHSCHULTE



Nichole Gerding, on her farm in Willsboro, uses 18th- and 19th-century skills to handcraft candles, teas and soaps that are sold worldwide. She travels the country giving demonstrations and teaching classes on the traditional arts.

FOR NICHOLE GERDING, proprietress of Thankful Sage Farm School, in Willsboro, seasonal planning guides her way of life. From household to homeschooling, work and recreation, Gerding brings 18th- and 19th-century practices and sensibilities into the 21st century. She slows things down and makes space for cyclical routines that inform the lives of her family, her clients and customers, her community and herself. She is driven to capture memory and pass it on, often grounding it in the olfactory sense. Gerding works to "normalize heritage skills" of early America and bring them back into common use.

Eleven years ago Gerding founded Thankful Sage Farm School at her kitchen table in Pennsylvania, making soaps and candles using traditional methods, materials and tools ("old good things," as she describes them). Today her handcrafted products can be found in more than 400 stores worldwide and she teaches heritage skills workshops to community groups, museum educators, historical reenactors and individuals, both in person and online. From cultivating sourdough starter and baking bread to collecting and pressing homegrown apples, growing and processing textiles such as flax, creating natural dyes from plants, blacksmithing, formulating folk medicines, and fabricating traditional scented candles and soaps, Gerding puts time out of joint. She is a historical anachronism perfectly fitted to the rapid rise in people's interest in being self-sufficient and learning new ("old") skills. Her own online retail/wholesale store includes products, journal postings, class offerings, and an expanding educational video series called Folklyfe. Gerding's values and habits do not translate to a simple life—her lifestyle is as complicated and challenging (and plugged in) as any. Thankful Sage relies and thrives on social media marketing and online participation, bringing yesterday into the present.

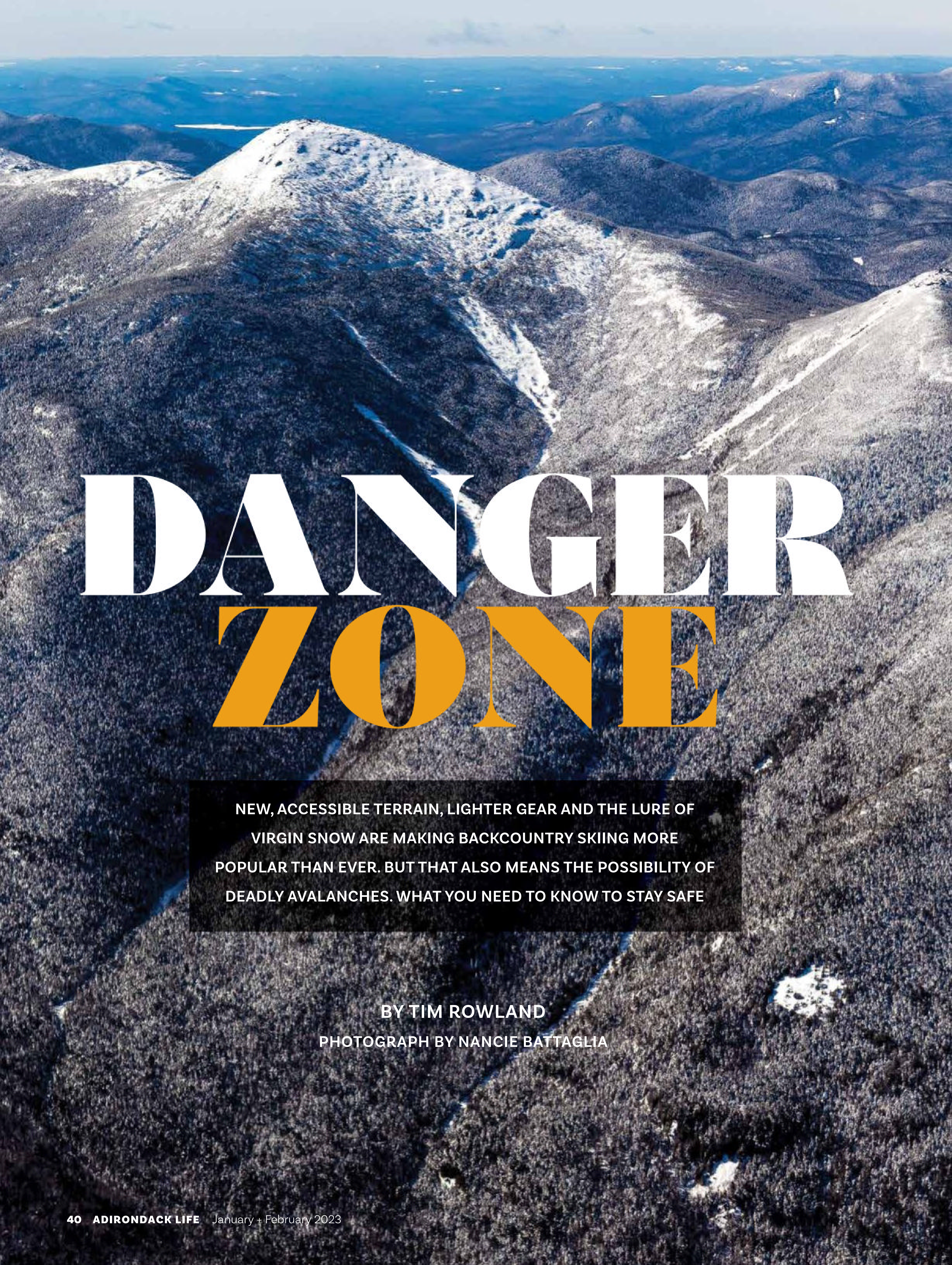
Not surprisingly, you can sometimes find Gerding teaching classes and training heritage educators in full colonial costume. Having grown up on mock battlefields, consumed by the smell of woodsmoke, campfire baking, and gunpowder, and interacting with people in period costume (her father is a traditional blacksmith and historical reenactor), Gerding was influenced from a young age to learn the skills, sensibilities and tasks of an early American woman. As an adult, after spending significant time exploring and working in the colonial town of Williamsburg, Virginia, she developed an interest in historic foodways and became an 18th-century food historian and domestic skills interpreter. Sourdough bread baking, for example, involves her 12-year-old starter (lovingly named "Satchel") in a multi-step, two-day process of feeding, mixing, kneading, proofing, scoring and baking—performed weekly. She also recommends sourdough starter as a replacement in any recipe calling for the leavening agents of baking soda and baking powder.

Thankful Sage Farm School is named for Gerding's eldest daughter, who in turn is the namesake of one of her North Country ancestors, Thankful Sage Robinson, mother to the owner of the historic Robinson Tavern.

Her candle making includes molded candles, using tin molds from the 18th century that Gerding rescued from antique fairs and shops and restored with her blacksmithing skills, along with beeswax dip tapers, hand-poured votives and acorn-cap candles. She collects acorn caps off the forest floor and pays local children five dollars per pound to augment her supply. She then sets the caps in rice as she carefully places the wick and fills them with beeswax from her own bees and other local hives.

For soap making she admits that, while she does have an old lye hopper for demonstration purposes, she relies on more modern

| *Continued on page 59*

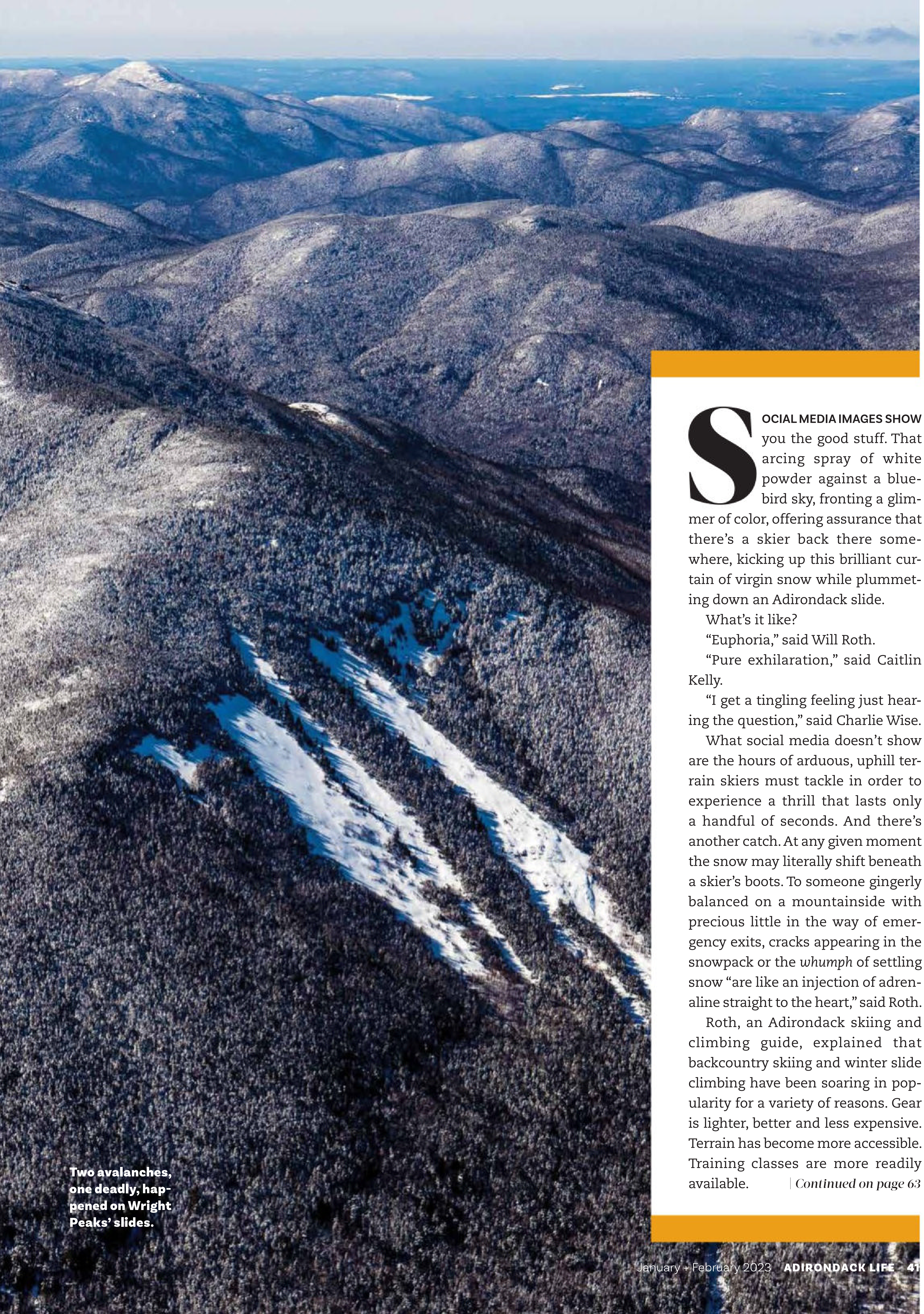


DANGER ZONE

NEW, ACCESSIBLE TERRAIN, LIGHTER GEAR AND THE LURE OF VIRGIN SNOW ARE MAKING BACKCOUNTRY SKIING MORE POPULAR THAN EVER. BUT THAT ALSO MEANS THE POSSIBILITY OF DEADLY AVALANCHES. WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW TO STAY SAFE

BY TIM ROWLAND

PHOTOGRAPH BY NANCIE BATTAGLIA



Two avalanches, one deadly, happened on Wright Peaks' slides.

SOCIAL MEDIA IMAGES SHOW you the good stuff. That arcing spray of white powder against a bluebird sky, fronting a glimmer of color, offering assurance that there's a skier back there somewhere, kicking up this brilliant curtain of virgin snow while plummeting down an Adirondack slide.

What's it like?

"Euphoria," said Will Roth.

"Pure exhilaration," said Caitlin Kelly.

"I get a tingling feeling just hearing the question," said Charlie Wise.

What social media doesn't show are the hours of arduous, uphill terrain skiers must tackle in order to experience a thrill that lasts only a handful of seconds. And there's another catch. At any given moment the snow may literally shift beneath a skier's boots. To someone gingerly balanced on a mountainside with precious little in the way of emergency exits, cracks appearing in the snowpack or the *whumph* of settling snow "are like an injection of adrenaline straight to the heart," said Roth.

Roth, an Adirondack skiing and climbing guide, explained that backcountry skiing and winter slide climbing have been soaring in popularity for a variety of reasons. Gear is lighter, better and less expensive. Terrain has become more accessible. Training classes are more readily available.

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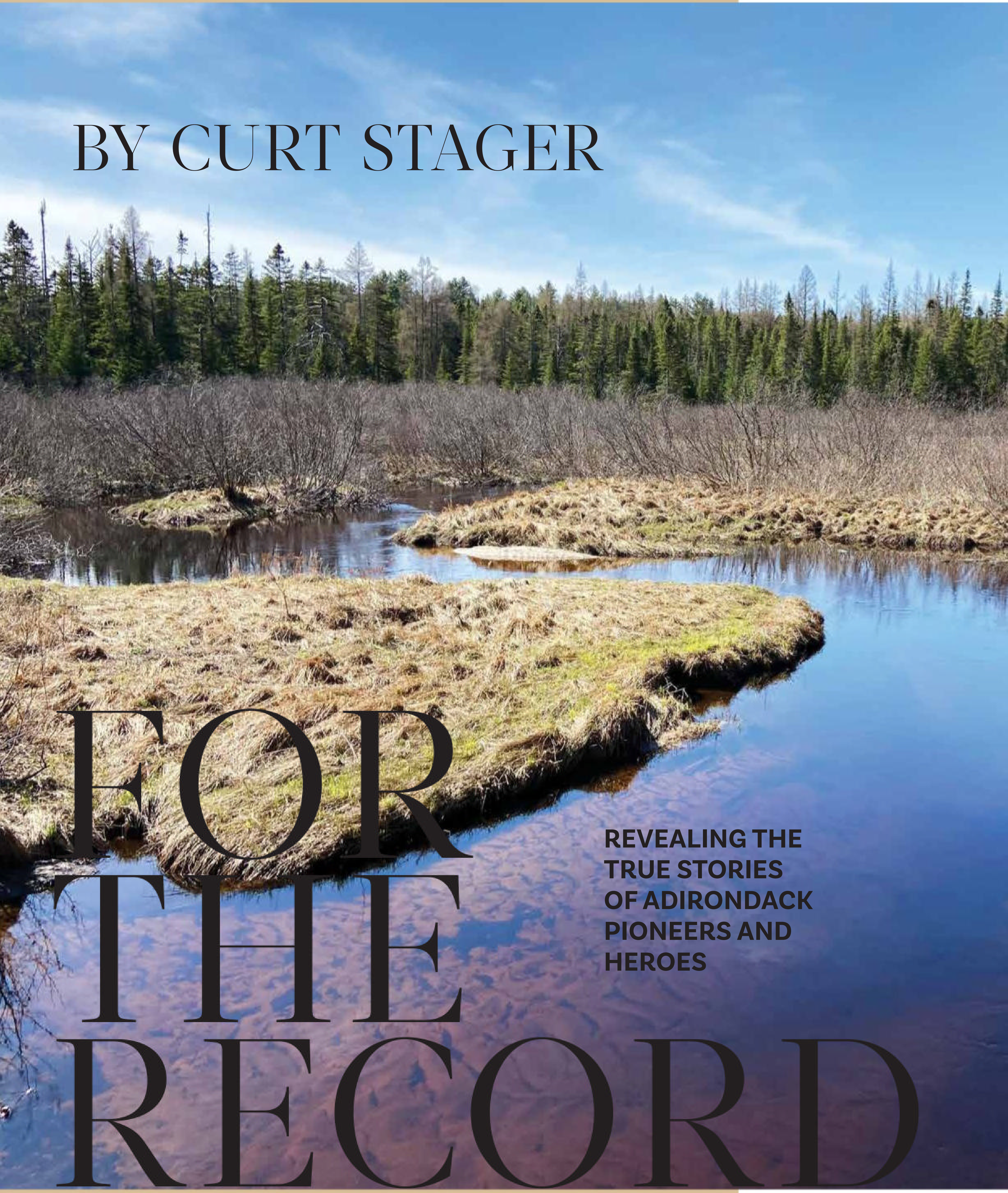
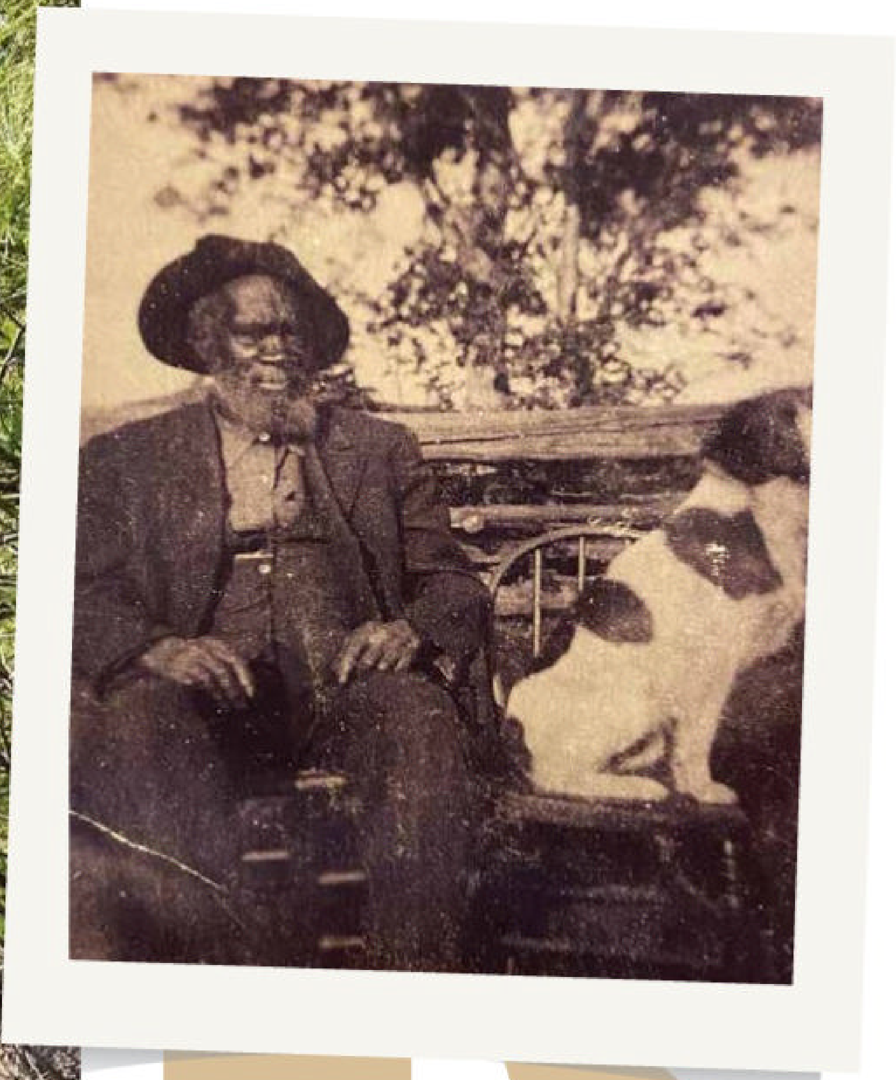


BY CURT STAGER

FOR THE RECORD

REVEALING THE TRUE STORIES OF ADIRONDACK PIONEERS AND HEROES



DURING THE LATE 1980s I was visiting a friend in Onchiota, when my companion pointed to a nearby stream and said, “That’s N—r Brook.” The official name was changed to Negro Brook decades ago, but years later it still nagged at me. How did such an offensive label arise in this lily-white corner of northern New York?

Later, a path of inquiry into the backstory of the brook arose naturally from my research at Paul Smith’s College, which focuses on reconstructing environmental history from layered archives of sediment beneath lakes. While comparing records from the Adirondacks with others in the Northeast, I had added the iconic Walden Pond to the list of study sites. Its association with Henry David Thoreau also created a homeward pull when Martha Swan, director of the

Walter Scott photograph courtesy of the Saranac Lake Free Library

The stream in Onchiota that led to the author’s quest for answers. Above: **Walter Scott, a Vermontville settler who came to the Adirondacks after the Civil War.**

Above: **Stephen Warren Morehouse descendant Susan Hendrie Morrow at home in Plattsburgh. Morehouse, whose parents were Gerrit Smith grantees, was a Civil War hero praised for his bravery and skills as a sharpshooter and scout.** Right: **The author plays "John Brown's Body" at Union Cemetery in Vermontville.**

human rights organization John Brown Lives!, approached me in May 2019. The group was planning to honor the birthday of abolitionist John Brown at his grave site near Lake Placid.

"I hear that you've been working at Walden Pond," she said. "How would you like to read some excerpts from Thoreau's essay 'A Plea for Captain John Brown' for us during our celebration at the farm?"

I accepted, in part, because I was embarrassed. I knew much more about the ecology of Walden Pond than about Thoreau's connection to abolitionism, but that would soon change. Re-reading Thoreau led me to the story of John Brown, a tragically misunderstood Adirondacker who gave his life to liberate people of color from bondage. In time, I also began to realize that Brown moved here in the first place because of a larger narrative of African-American pioneers.

During the mid-1800s, human-rights activists including Frederick Douglass and Willis Hodges helped to promote a back-to-the-land movement that would empower Black residents of New York to gain financial independence and societal respect as members of multi-racial farming communities that could also serve as a model for the nation. Between 1846 and 1853 wealthy abolitionist Gerrit Smith donated 120,000 acres of his Adirondack properties to support the cause, and in 1849 John Brown moved his family to North Elba to offer expertise and encouragement to the settlers.

As historian Amy Godine, author of the forthcoming *The Black Woods*, explained to me, Smith's primary aim was to thwart the state's voter-suppression laws. "Back then," she said, "free men of color in New York could vote only if they owned $250 worth of property, a financial hurdle designed to disenfranchise a potential Black electorate. The proslavery business lobby in New York City was not interested in growing an antislavery voting bloc. That would be very bad for business." Smith's grants could therefore empower Black New Yorkers to vote through land ownership. Aaron Mair, the first African-American president of the Sierra Club and Wilderness Campaign director for the Adirondack Council, calls those pioneers "suffrage settlers."

There was a hitch. The parcels were too small to be worth the requisite amount until they were cleared and converted into farms, and many were unsuitable for crops. Without experience in pioneer lifestyles or sufficient resources to live on before their first harvest, most of the largely urban grantees never occupied their wilderness lots. Of those who accepted the challenge, many moved on after a few years. But a significant number stayed, raised families and become valued members of their communities. Some left descendants who still live in the region. Despite those success stories, some ill-informed sources have warped the saga of those hardy people.

The two-volume text *A History of the Adirondacks* is a favorite resource among local history buffs. It was written more than a century ago, and not by a qualified historian but by banker Alfred L. Donaldson. I, too, once considered it reputable, but when I recently read it more carefully it turned my stomach.

"The Adirondack wilderness, for obvious reasons, was the least attractive and

Susan Hendrie Morrow and stream, pages 42–43, photographs courtesy of Curt Stager. Union Cemetery photograph courtesy of Kary Johnson

A small American flag flutters next to Warren's grave, a humble acknowledgment of his military service to the nation. How ironic that the pseudo-historian who wrote that these people were too lazy and incompetent to live here still receives local accolades. But such oversights are beginning to change.

least suited to the negro…. (and) the attempt to combine an escaped slave with a so-called Adirondack farm was about as promising of agricultural results as would be the placing of an Italian lizard on a Norwegian iceberg…. the natural gregariousness of the race tended to defeat the purpose of these individual holdings … (because) the darkies began to build their shanties in one place instead of on their separate grants."

"Those who stayed permanently were roused to spasmodic activity by (John) Brown, who induced them to work … (but) unless directed by him, they did nothing for themselves or for their own land … As a negro colony it was a failure and soon dwindled away."

And so on.

Eager for newer, better sources of information I turned to Sally Svenson's *Blacks in the Adirondacks*, Mary MacKenzie's *The Plains of Abraham*, and the expertise of scholars such as Hadley Kruczek-Aaron, Donald Papson, Sandra Weber and Amy Godine. From them I learned that Donaldson's text was riddled with historical errors. Most of the settlers were free and they were not clumped into shantytowns. Many became successful farmers without John Brown's assistance. With that firmer foundation I began to seek ways to grasp the story more fully, with visual aids like those I employ in my lake research.

Martha Swan and Amy Godine gave me a copy of Gerrit Smith's list of 3,000 land grants, and I spent weeks positioning those lots atop 19th-century survey charts of the region. As each tiny square joined the mosaic, a stunning picture emerged. Roughly half of a 400-square-mile swath extending from the High Peaks northward through Lake Placid, Vermontville and Loon Lake was once Black-owned, along with a smaller sector of Hamilton County. Many of the lots were later taken over by the state through sales or in lieu of unpaid taxes, so charts of the grants resemble today's maps of popular wild areas including Mount Baker near my home in

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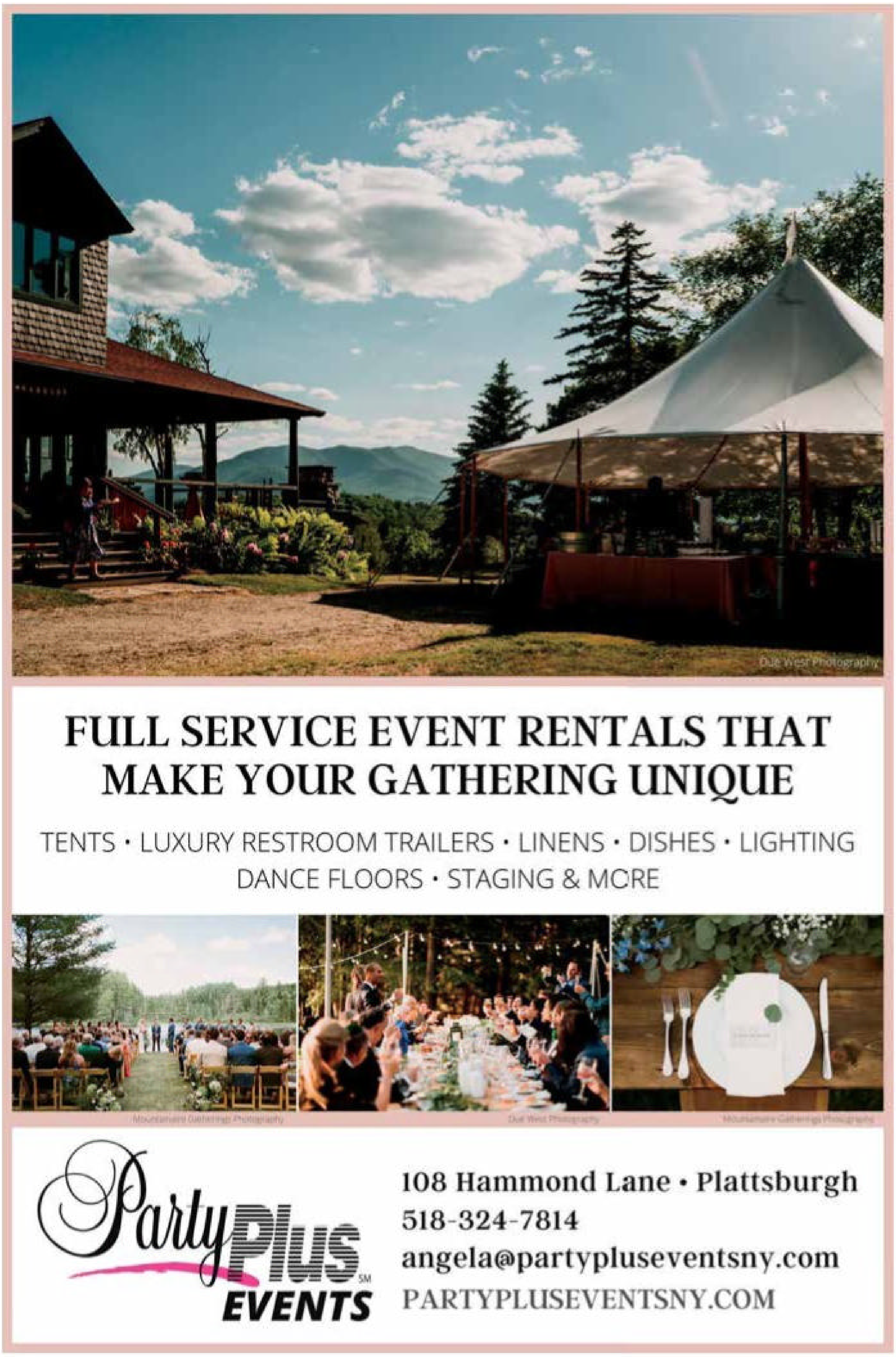

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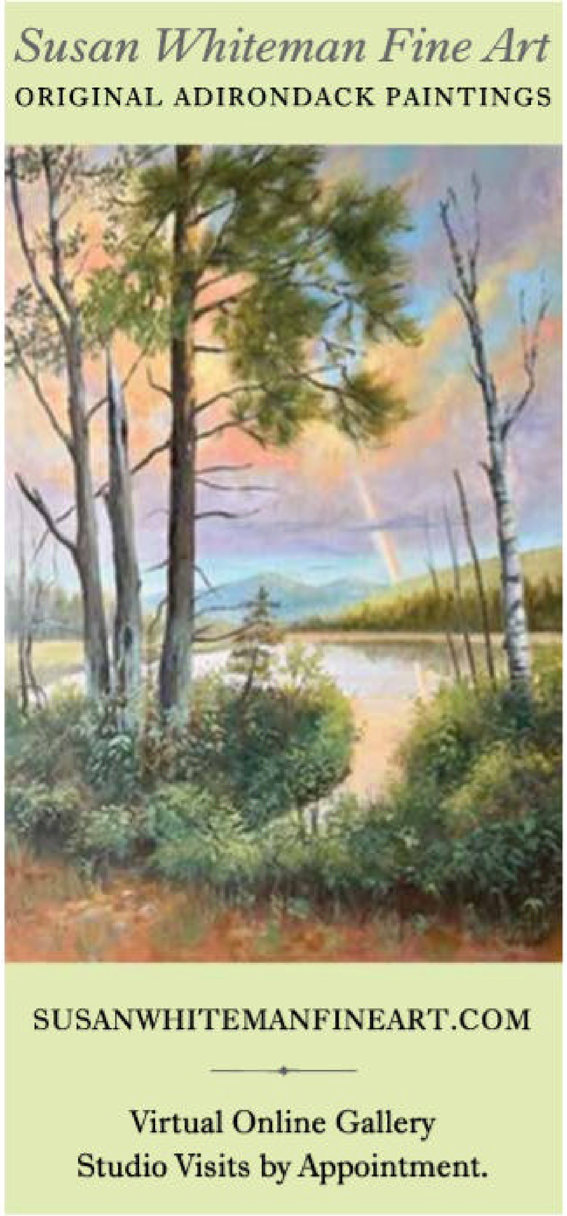

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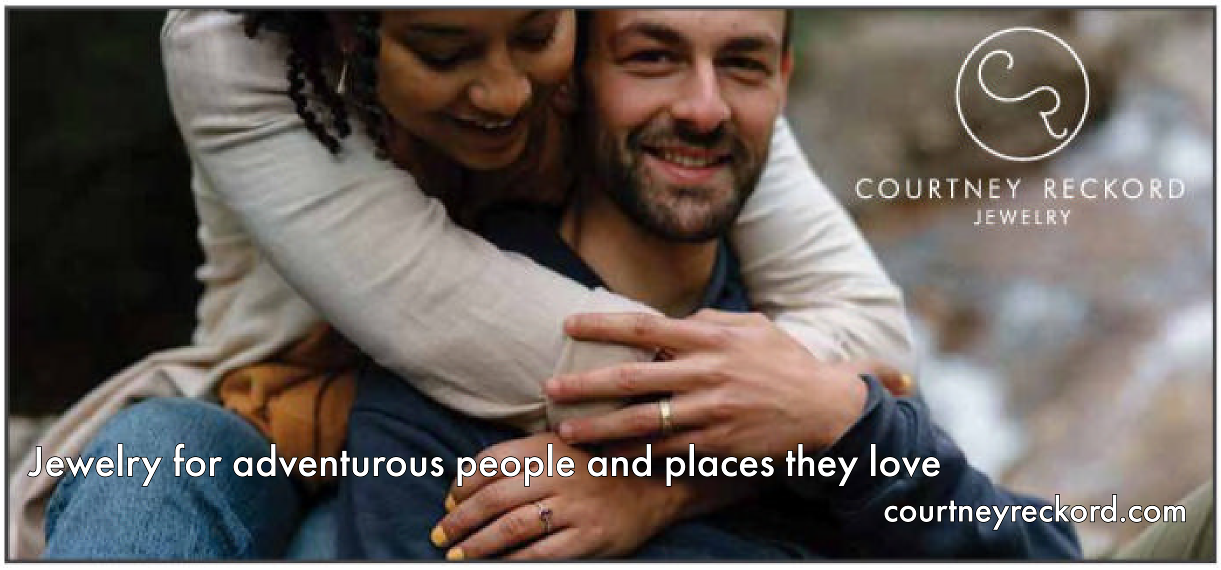

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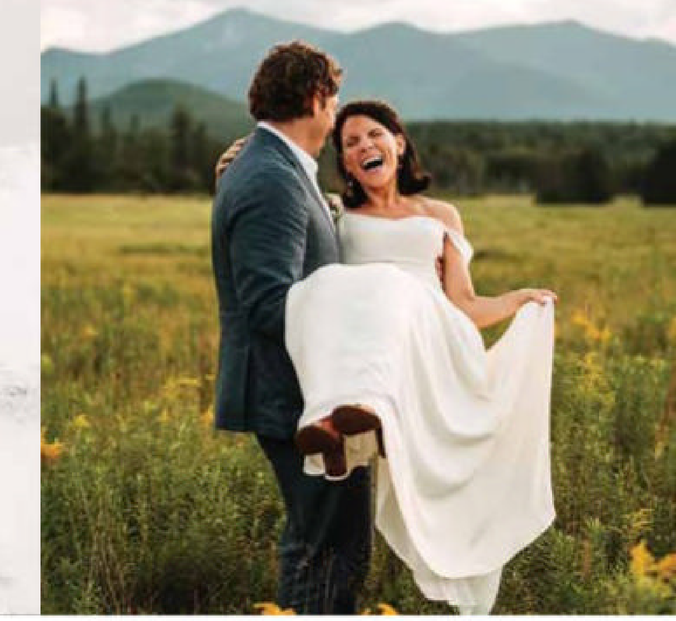

Adirondack Weddings

Location, location, location. There's a reason the Adirondack region is such a popular wedding destination. Stunning summits and mountainscapes, lovely lakes and lush forests—it's all here. From Lake George to Lake Placid, couples can choose all-inclusive resorts, where guests stay and the festivities happen on campus. Or there are plenty of places in the park to customize an event, at covered bridges, beaches, farms, forests or meadows.

Decor? The surrounding landscape does most of the work, but borrowing from the natural world adds even more to an Adirondack-style celebration. Balsam boughs and pine cones make classic table centerpieces, and wildflowers—black-eyed Susan, echinacea and Queen Anne's lace—create lovely bouquets.

Favors for guests can range from treats they'll enjoy while in the Adirondacks, such as locally made maple candies and craft beer; items that'll come in handy during the celebration itself, like natural bug spray or a cozy shawl or throw woven from area alpacas and sheep; or gifts to take home to remember the occasion, such as hiking guides, Adirondack made candles, or seedlings that, no matter where they're planted, will represent a special moment and a special place.

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Cool Beginnings

The Lake Placid roots of Jamaican bobsled coach Howard Siler

BY CLAYTON TRUTOR

Initially, the Jamaican bobsled team's presence at the 1988 Olympics in Calgary was viewed by many as a novelty—a team from a country without winter competing in the Winter Olympics. But the athletes showed their prowess in both the two-man and four-man bobsled competitions, holding their own against teams representing countries with long histories in the sport. *Cool Runnings*, a highly fictionalized account of the team's story, became a box-office smash for Disney in 1993. The man who built the Jamaican team into international competitors, three-time US Olympian Howard Siler, spent much of his adult life in the North Country.

Siler was an athletic man, standing six feet tall and weighing 200 pounds during his years as a competitive bobsledder. He took up the bobsled while serving in the Air Force, earning a spot on its two-man Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) team. In February 1967, Siler and teammate Gary Sheffield won the AAU two-man bobsled championship but suffered a horrific crash at the finish line that sent both men to the hospital. Siler soon recovered and returned to competition.

He served for many years at Plattsburgh Air Force Base, while living in Saranac Lake and Lake Placid, and was a member of the prestigious Lake Placid Bobsled Club. Siler trained in Placid for the 1968 Winter Olympics in Grenoble, France, securing a spot as an alternate.

During his time in the North Country Siler made headlines away from the track. In the summer of 1967, he saved the life of a Plattsburgh doctor who was injured while boating. The doctor had been sailing close to the shoreline on Lake Champlain when his aluminum mast struck an overhead wire. The electrical charge knocked the doctor out of his boat and unconscious. Siler saw what had happened and immediately dove into the water, rescuing the man and reviving him with CPR.

In 1969, Siler was part of a US four-man bobsled team that won a bronze at the World Championships, which were held at their home course in Lake Placid. Then, in 1972, Siler was named to both the US two-man and four-man teams for the Winter Olympics in Sapporo, Japan. In the two-man competition, Siler and Paul Lamey finished 16th, but the four-man US team crashed.

After missing the 1976 Olympics, Siler made the 1980 team and put on a great show for the fans in Lake Placid. He and teammate Dick Nalley finished fifth

Jamaica's 1988 bobsled team. Below: **The 1969 USA bobsled team; Howard Siler second from left.**

Jamaican team photograph by Nancie Battaglia. Siler photograph courtesy of US Bobsled and Skeleton

in the two-man competition while his four-man crew finished 13th overall. Following his third Olympics, Siler shifted into coaching and briefly served as head coach of the US team.

The retired bobsledder got into the insurance business and returned to his native Virginia. But in the fall of 1987 he received a call from a man named George Fitch, who worked for the State Department in Foreign Services Development. Fitch had been working in Jamaica and had seen the country's annual Push Cart Derby, where competitors raced down hills in homemade carts at speeds approaching 50 miles per hour. Fitch believed the speed, power, steering skills and sheer bravery of the competitors made them ideal candidates for bobsledding. He recruited dozens of potential candidates for a Jamaican team with hopes of competing at the Calgary Olympics, which were just six months away.

Siler, not surprisingly, thought the idea of building a team so quickly with athletes who came from a tropical country was impossible. None of these potential bobsledders had ever seen snow or ice before. The team didn't have a sled or uniforms or a training facility. Fitch assured Siler that he would take care of the financial aspects. He convinced Siler to build a team—one capable of competing at an international level.

Siler traveled to Jamaica and found a wealth of outstanding athletes. The four men he selected for the team (Dudley Stokes, Devon Harris, Michael White and Caswell Allen) had all excelled in track and field—White went on to represent Jamaica in the 100 meters at the 1988 Summer Olympics in Seoul, South Korea. Several of them were experienced "pushers" from the Push Cart Derby and several were members of the Jamaican military. A fifth man, Chris Stokes, a former collegiate track star and the brother of Dudley Stokes, replaced Allen after an injury in training.

Siler's first efforts to train his team took place at Lake Placid's Mount Van Hoevenberg, where they could get a feel for competing in the winter. The team got used to walking on ice and pushing

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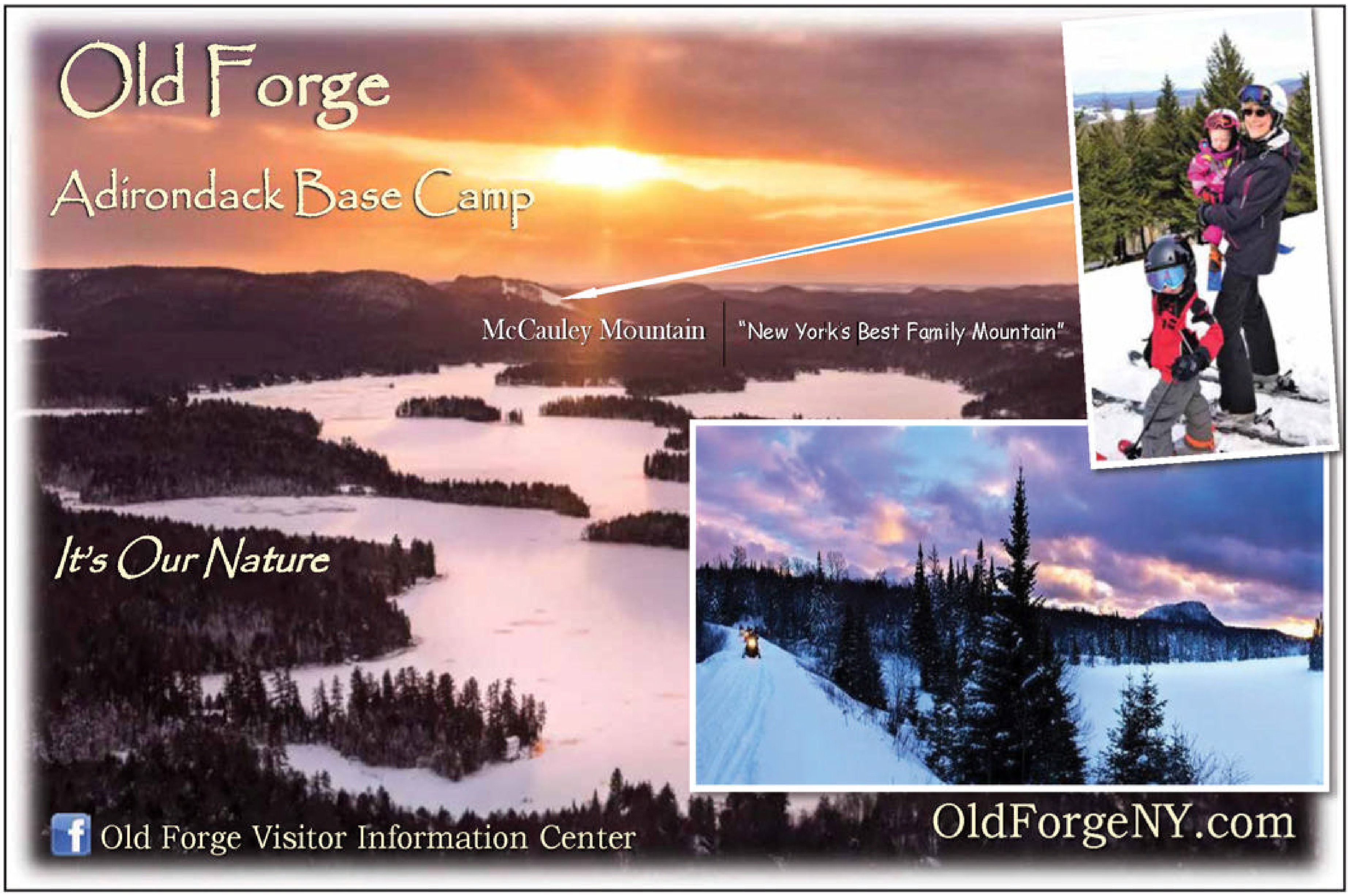
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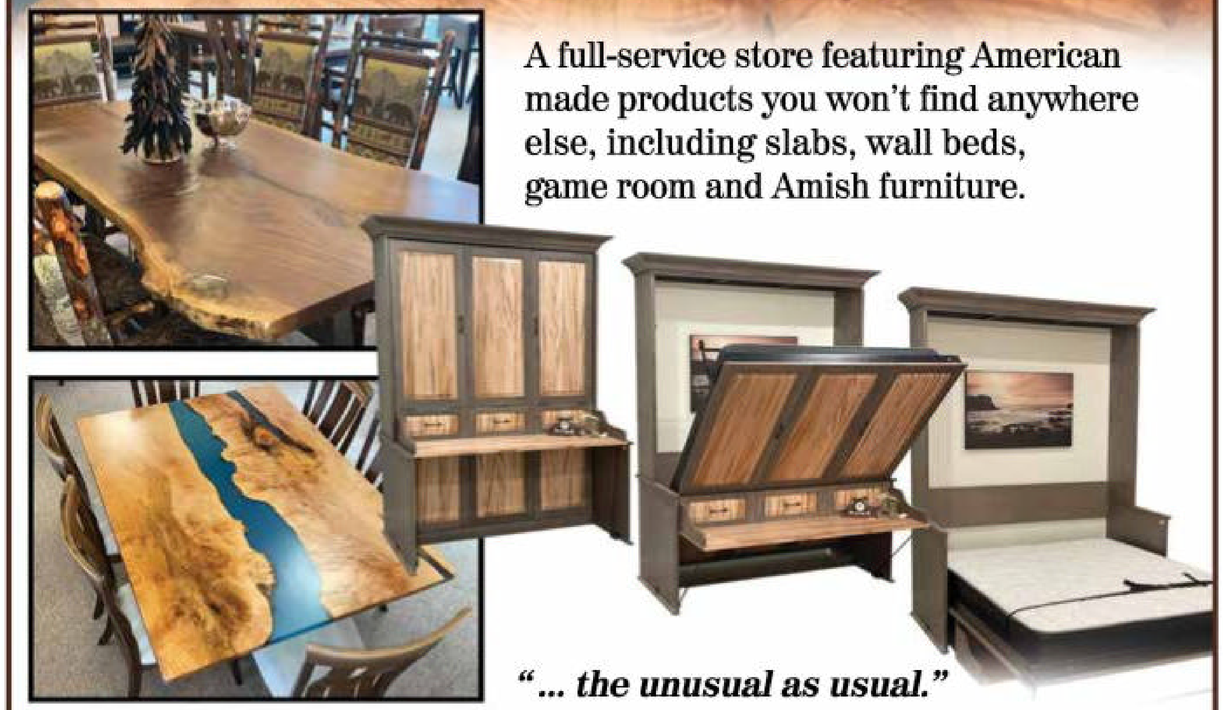

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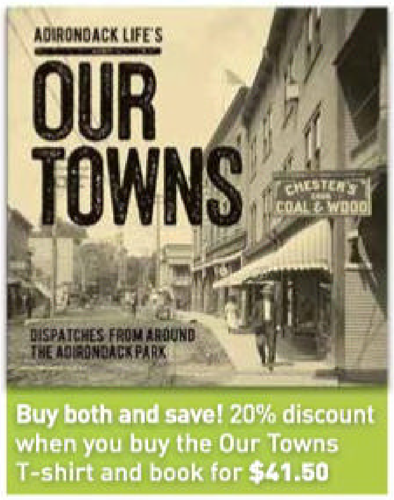

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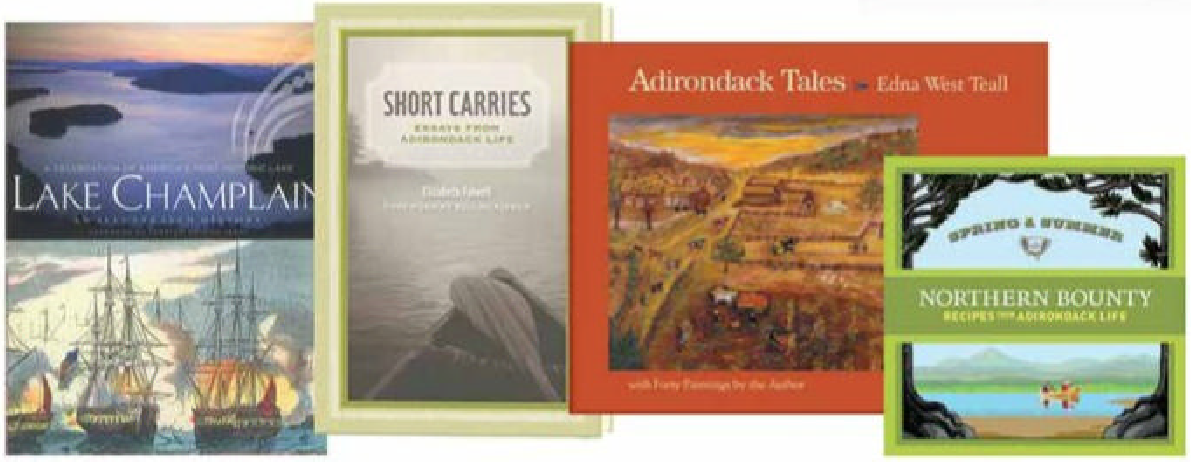

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Above: Heart & Chain with Rose Quartz

an older sled that Siler had borrowed from the Lake Placid Bobsled Club before going on to train in Canada and Austria.

Fitch, too, came through with the money. He worked closely with Jamaica's Tourism Board to promote the team with T-shirts and the release of a reggae single by Freddie Powell, a "pusher" who was an alternate for the team. The ventures paid for a $15,000 sled, travel, equipment and training.

"This Jamaican Bobsled team was a real thing. It was blood, sweat and tears," Siler said in *Breaking the Ice*, a 2014 documentary about the '88 team. While the athletes were depicted in *Cool Runnings* as a laid-back, almost comedic group, Siler said the men he coached were serious competitors committed to honing their craft. Similarly, John Candy's portrayal of Coach Irv Blitzer—a down-on-his-luck former gold medalist who drinks too much and got kicked out of the sport for cheating—bears no resemblance to Siler.

Siler and his team were immediately the toast of Calgary, signing autographs and posing for pictures with thousands of new admirers. The Jamaican team proved they belonged in Calgary in both the two-man and four-man competitions. The two-man team of Dudley Stokes and Michael White finished 30th overall and ranked as highly as 22nd after their second of four runs, near the middle of the 41-team field. In the four-man race, the Jamaican team finished near the bottom in the first and second runs. In their third run, the team was clocked as highly as seventh coming out of the starting line but lost control near the finish line. After suffering a nasty crash, the Jamaican team recovered enough to guide their sled to the finish line in an iconic moment that was later dramatized in *Cool Runnings*.

Members of the 1988 Jamaican team participated at the 1992, 1994 and 1998 winter games, earning further esteem for their increasingly competitive performances. Howard Siler, instead, chose to return to a quieter life. He died of cancer at age 69 in July 2014. In 2015, he was inducted into the USA Bobsled/Skeleton Hall of Fame.

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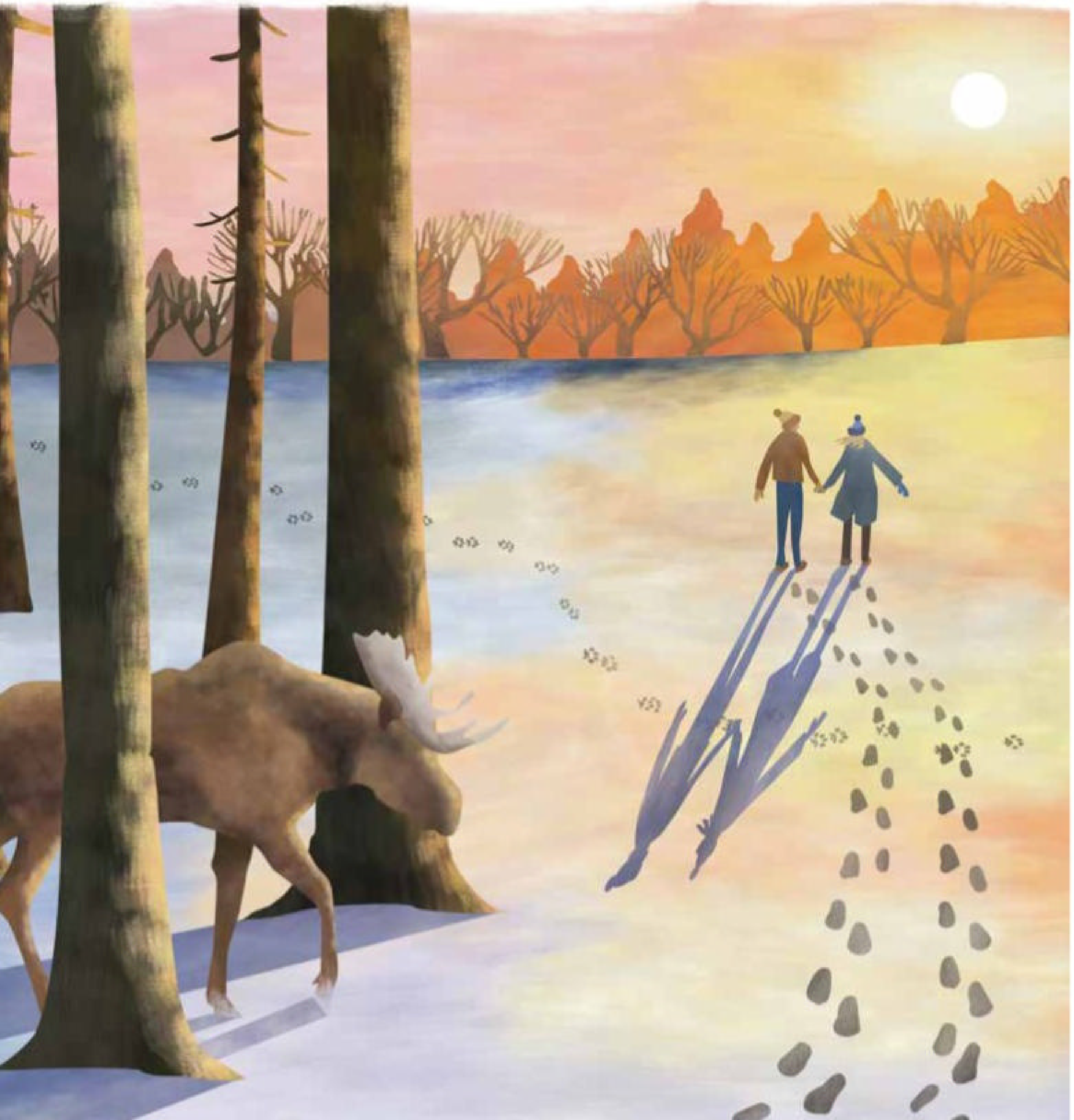
First Tracks

Searching for mysteries in the natural world

BY JULIE CHRISTMAS

"It's one-one-two-two," I remark as my husband and I climb out of his truck. January 1, 2022. He chuckles. "Let's hope we make it to one-two-three-four." I quickly do the math. "I'll be 67 and you'll be 74." This gives us both pause. But we agree to spend New Year's Day tramping through the woods like this for many more years.

Drip … drip … drip. I look up through the spruce canopy and see millions of tiny water droplets and it takes a moment to understand why this seems odd. It's uncommon in midwinter to hear rain fall here in the woods instead of snow. I smell balsam and damp earth and my husband's wet wool jacket—so strange to smell anything in January.



The forest seems especially quiet today, with no wind in the boughs above and little bird chatter. A ruffed grouse couple startles us with their characteristic *whoosh* as they fly away, disturbed by our footsteps. The wet snow scrunches underfoot as we trudge along. My husband is a forester and manages a large tract near Lake Lila. Checking the landowner's camps and his wildlife cameras provides a pleasant excuse for our excursion.

We are hiking this trail without snowshoes. The punky, wet snow is a blank canvas, displaying animal tracks for our enjoyment. Deer tracks are easiest to spot—interesting, since the deer would typically have migrated elsewhere by now. No doubt they stayed longer, enjoying the warm fall. Their tracks are most evident near trees my husband cut for the landowner a week ago. The tender tops, he tells me, are a favorite winter food after snow covers the beechnuts.

Crouching down, he points at bobcat tracks, showing me how the paw prints lie one after the other in perfect sequence. I marvel at how they resemble a household cat. Next, he shows me a coyote's claw marks, appearing like two pinpricks in the snow. He differentiates them from our dogs' tracks, whose nail marks splay apart. The coyote had been running, possibly sprinting after the rabbit that has also left signature prints. The appearance of bear tracks surprises us. Did this bear leave his cozy den for a midwinter snack, or have warmer temperatures delayed his hibernation?

We last hiked this trail the week before Thanksgiving. My husband was hunting deer at twilight, and he left me at a hidden meadow, continuing up the path to state land while I stood at the edge of the clearing. Night fell and I watched the stars burn brighter as darkness grew. I listened to the night sounds, stamping my boots quietly against the cold until my husband collected me on his way out. This same meadow, nicknamed "Moose Meadow," is our destination today.

Approaching the clearing quietly, we hope we will see a moose. It seems unlikely. The moose are elusive and

Illustration by Gwen Jamison Vogel

appear when they're least expected. I have often accompanied my husband on his visits here, yet I have never glimpsed the huge animals. My theory is that I will not see a moose when I wish to see a moose. I will see a moose when he or she wishes to be seen.

A good friend of ours who lives in the Adirondacks was cleaning a toilet when she looked through the window and spotted a moose casually munching on her lawn. I have heard many similar stories. An article I read recently claimed only 700 moose live in the Adirondacks, concentrated in three areas. They exist everywhere in the park, but population densities are low. I am frustrated, though, because I know they are here in these woods. We frequently see them on trail cameras.

As we step quietly into the misty meadow, the fog hangs above us, winding between the dark green pines. I expect a great rack buck or a massive bull moose to appear majestically in the mist, surprised by our presence. Instead, as we pick our way across the frozen field, we find enormous moose tracks. My husband lays his glove near the prints to show scale and snaps a photo.

The day is silent. So silent. I think we both seek this as much as the moose sighting. In our home, the holidays are happy, noisy and chaotic, with children home from college and grandchildren and cookie baking and gift exchanges and friends stopping in for a cup of cheer. This quiet day in the woods is our reward—the perfect end to a busy season and a past year of pandemics, politics, discord and uncertainty.

We linger as the light fades slowly in the winter forest, casting longer shadows as dusk approaches and the first day of the new year passes peacefully. The mist swirls and grows thicker around us, creating a sense of excitement and mystery. What will this new year bring? Will it hurt? Will it heal? Will we lose cherished friends as we did last year? Will we make new acquaintances? We cannot see what lies ahead. The future year is unknowable, as misty and mysterious as a moose meadow on a quiet New Year's Day.

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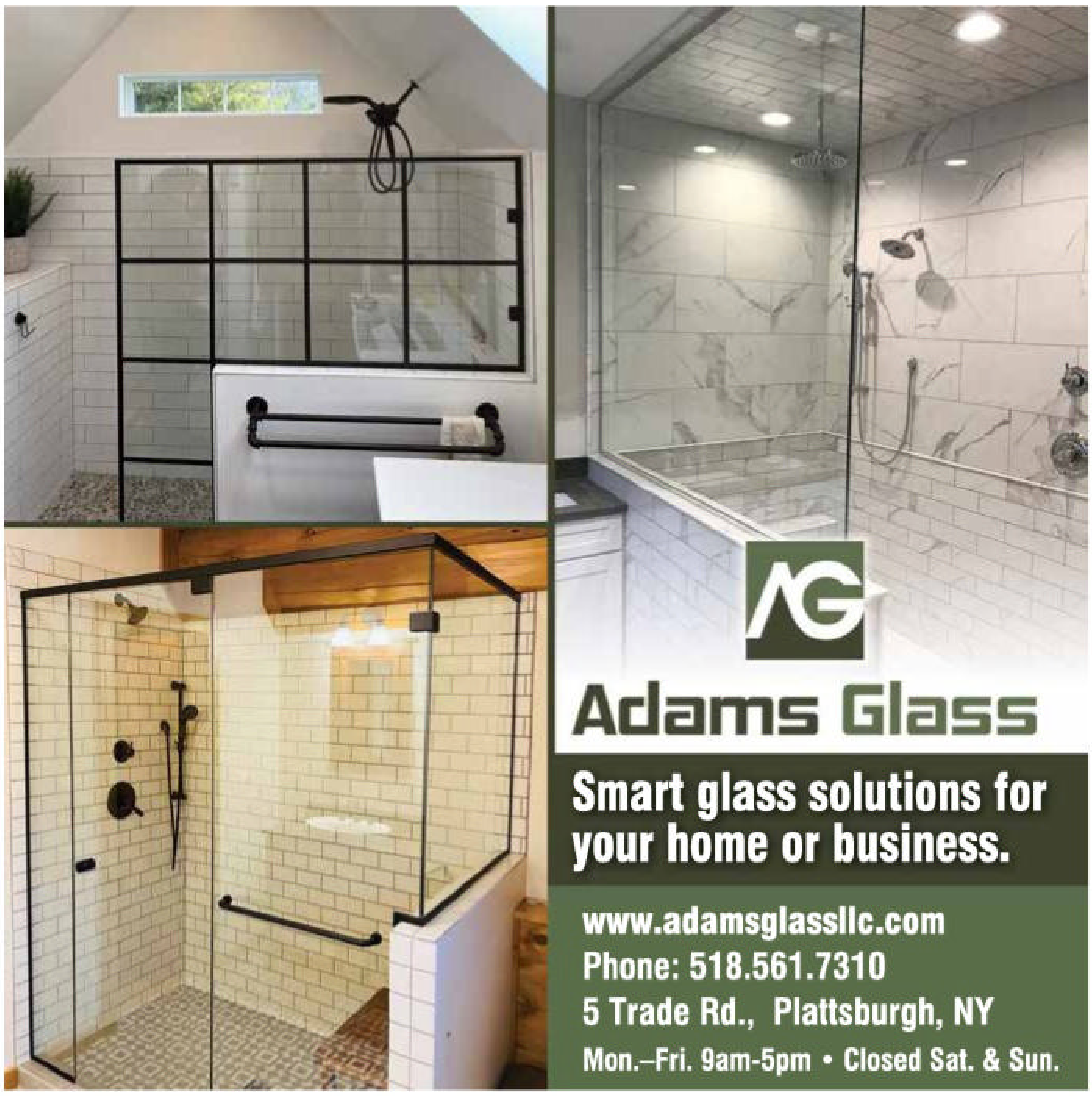

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ZERO TO JACKRABBIT

Continued from page 31

about my own ability to rise again floated in my weary head as I took a Coolidge back at White Pine, soaking off the hip zaps and knee zings that had accrued after just one day of Jackrabbiting. Meanwhile, Sarah dressed and braised a pair of rabbits. We ate the delicious, tender flesh with roasted baby potatoes at our cabin's big oak table and I tried to drown my misgivings in a bottle of Alpe Amaro Jenny had brought along for just such moments.

I was particularly troubled because I knew from personal experience how the next day had the potential to be the mother of all yard sales. Two weeks previous to our trip, I'd gone out on a test run with Josh Wilson, current head of the Barkeater Trails Alliance, which maintains the Jackrabbit Trail, and skied a portion of "McKenzie Pass"—a precipitous rise and fall that connects the Saranac Lake portion of the trail to the Lake Placid section. "If you can ski this part, I think you can probably ski the whole thing," he'd told me as we made our way up from the trail near Lake Placid Lodge. Going up wasn't much of a problem. But when Josh felt satisfied that I would pass muster he turned us around and I found myself staring down into an icy Hades. For the next half hour while Josh expertly skied on ahead, I wobbled, tumbled, crashed and slid, dinging my head again and again on the ice and rocks. By the time I caught up with Wilson in the parking lot, blood was dripping down my brow and I raced to my car in shame, thanking him over my shoulder for a "really great day."

> **When I led the five of us to the parking lot, it was with a terrible foreboding. I'd been warned that the Saranac Lake side of the pass was even "spicier" than the hill that had so gashed me.**

Two weeks later, when I led the five of us to the same parking lot, it was with a terrible foreboding. Jamie West McGiver, our photographer for this story and unofficial guide for the day, had warned that the Saranac Lake side of the pass that I'd not skied on my previous test run was even "spicier" than the hill that had so gashed me. But this time I had three things going for me: six inches of fresh powder, Terry Watson's training and a helmet.

Four of us made it briskly up the Lake Placid side (Sean had bailed without shame around mile three). And by the time we reached the high point of the pass the sun had broken through. We stopped for lunch at a lean-to and then, before taking on Mount Spice, Jamie passed us a flask of "liquid courage." Downing a shot, I felt a little bit of warming against the 10-degree weather and then plunged into the pass.

David and Sarah, the best downhillers of the group, descended without incident. A+ Jenny also clocked a clean run. I skied longer and farther downhill on cross-country skis than I'd ever done before. I also fell and fell and fell. But the soft powder and the camaraderie of my good friends made the whole thing feel more like comedy than tragedy.

Sean, still translating Pirandello, was there waiting for us at Casa del Sol, in Saranac Lake, when we emerged from the trail. Vast amounts of Mexican food and margaritas were consumed. And then we returned to White Pine. Most of us took a Coolidge while Jenny, not in the least fatigued, explored the grounds of the camp, reporting back on the fabulous great room, the antique bowling alley and the miles of additional trail that we could ski if we'd had only a few more days.

TOO OFTEN IN THE ADIRONDACKS we're prone to count things we've conquered: Forty-six High Peaks. Fifty miles around Cranberry Lake. Twenty-five fire towers. Why all these numbers? In the fog of youth, we're prone to fall under their spell and even calculate our self-worth relative to how many miles we've deposited into our lifetime accounts. Jackrabbit Johannsen never seemed big on numbers. For him it wasn't the miles he'd logged on skis that made him feel satisfied. What

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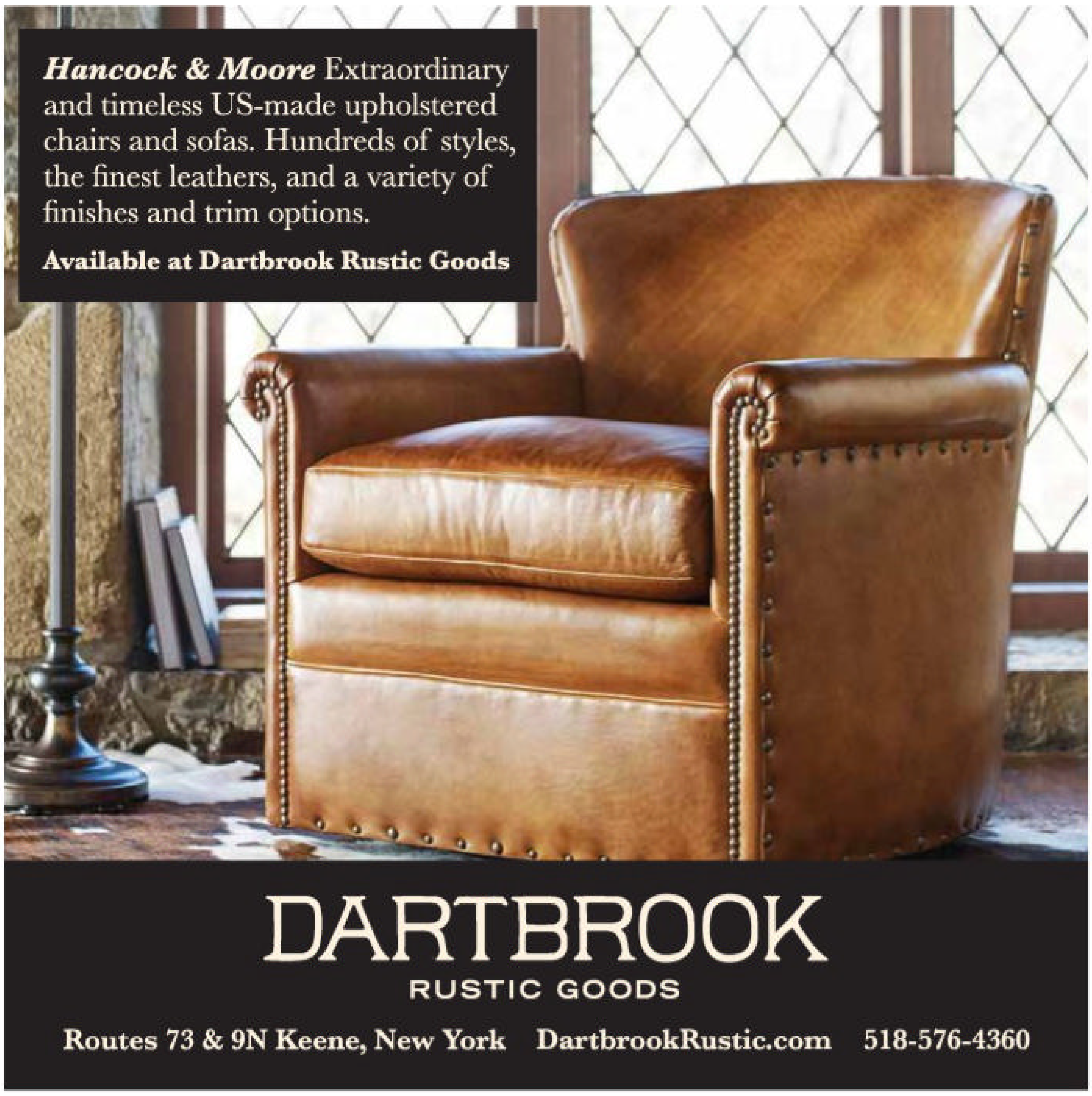

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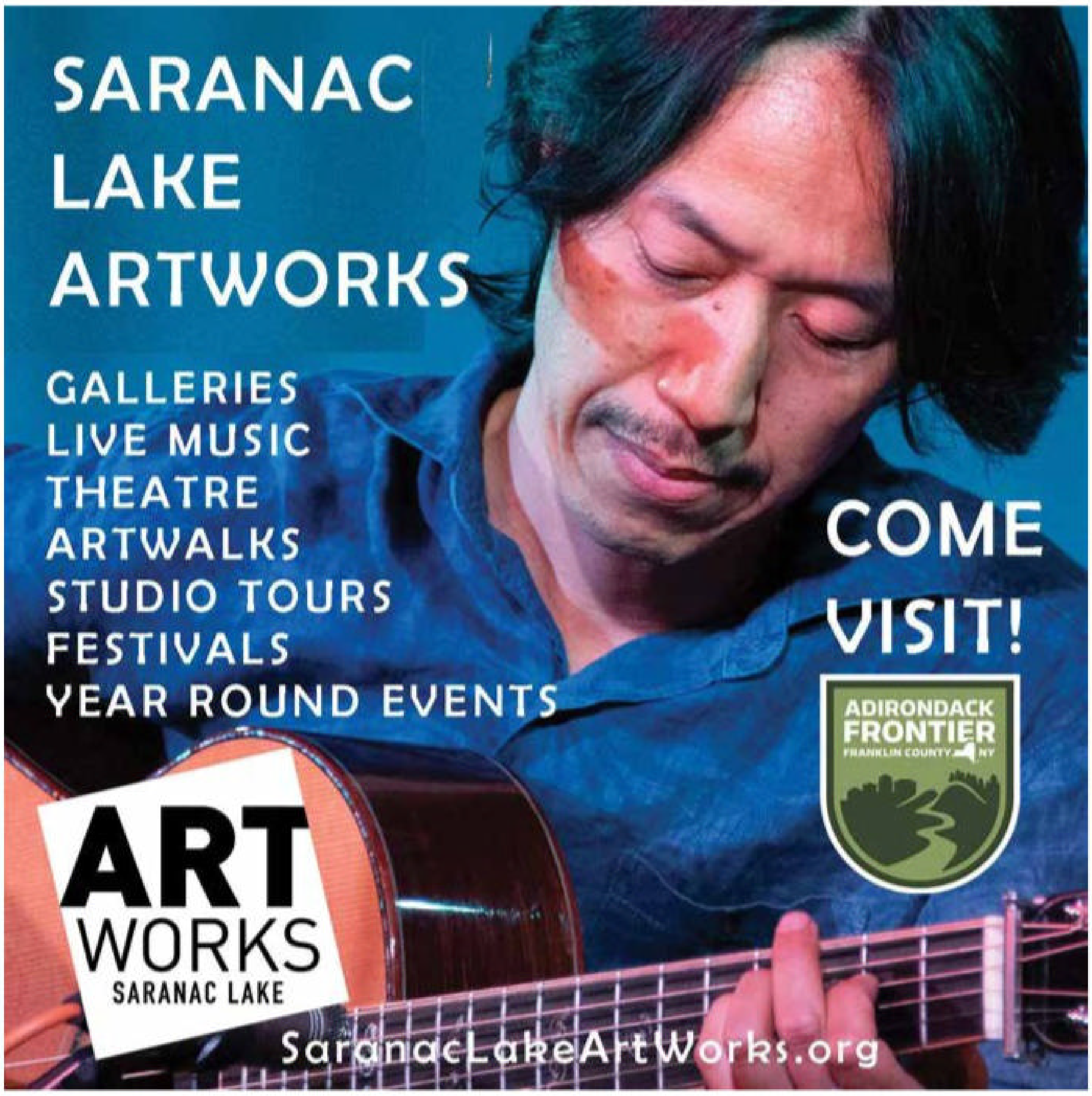

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was important was just keeping himself and others going. When he looked back on his long life, the numbers he really treasured were the thousands of people, young and old, who had discovered Nordic skiing through his example.

For our last day of Jackrabbiting, the plan had been to log one last leg, starting outside Lake Placid, mounting the territory back toward Cascade and then a final descent into Keene. But whereas the previous days had stayed just warm enough to allow knees and elbows to keep bending, the mercury barely broke zero and it threatened to dip into serious negative territory in the afternoon.

I looked at my dear friends who had trusted me to plan something fun and challenging while at the same time leaving it to me to assess the risks and get them home safely. It occurred to me that the only number that really mattered was the number you needed to exceed to be a little better than the last time. "You know what?" I said. "Let's take it easy. Not too easy. But easy."

We spent the last morning sampling some last pieces of the Jackrabbit, including the loop of the Peninsula trail in Lake Placid followed by pastries and coffee at nearby Simply Gourmet. Then the last three miles into Keene, followed by a return to Cascade Center to warm up before finally saying goodbye to one another in the parking lot.

"You know what was really true and good about this trip?" asked Sarah after returning her skis and poles to the rental shop. "At our age, there's always the danger that you'll look ahead and say, 'I don't know if I can do this.' A month ago, my back went out. I could have said, 'I can't do this with my back being like this.' But you know what? I didn't listen to that voice. Instead, what I said was I have to get my back better.

"I have to do it. For Jackrabbit."

Paul Greenberg is the author of *The Climate Diet: 50 Ways to Trim Your Carbon Footprint* and five other books, including *The New York Times* bestseller *Four Fish*. He wrote "Shopping for the Apocalypse," about buying climate-safe land, in this magazine's *At Home in the Adirondacks 2021* issue.

FINDING YOUR ROOTS
Continued from page 39

methods of preparation—paired with early recipes—for safety's sake.

In 2020 she and her family moved to Willsboro as the pandemic set in. They purchased a three-season home in November, sight unseen, making their first winter extremely difficult, cold and isolating. But the time was also prosperous for Thankful Sage Farm School. “Wildly, I did pretty well during the pandemic,” said Gerding. “Retail shops, mostly online shops, were thriving, and orders were constant and consistent. Most of this rise was happening while I was busy making tapers, nursing a baby, and posting on social media. The candle side of the business doubled and I sold over 3,000 bars of my Dirt Soap in 2021 alone. This was so helpful for our family, as this became our only income.”

> Gerding is driven to capture memory and pass it on, often grounding it in the olfactory sense. She works to “normalize heritage skills” of early America and bring them back to common use.

Gerding even found herself transformed into the 19th-century equivalent of the Butterball Turkey Talk-line: “I would get messaged on every outlet—YouTube, email, voicemail, text—about sourdough, folks wanting to know proper baking temps and asking flour questions. We were also busy filming classes for small museums and institutions.” She said that “despite the fears and seclusion of that time, we were spinning and never really alone. It remains a special time for me. When fear was king, so many people found hope and fulfillment in the products I offered and the skills I could teach them. I am never not rewarded for my hard work, no matter how small or large my task.”

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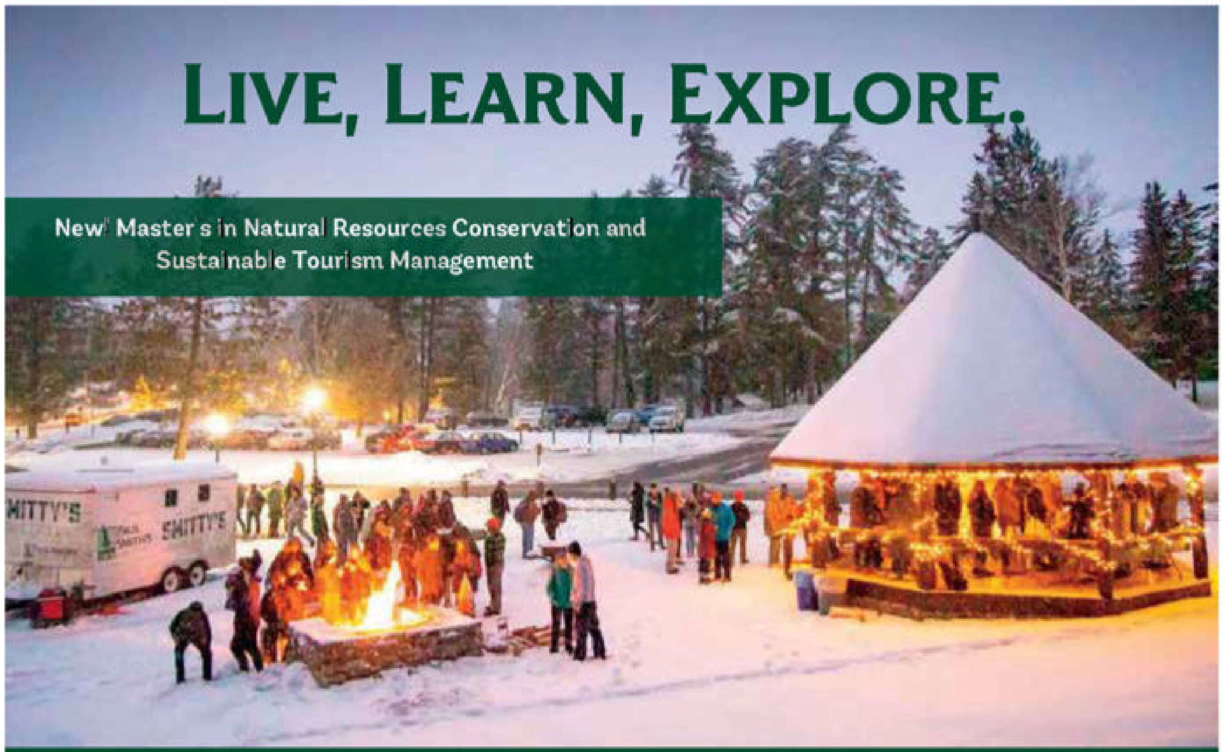

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for her eldest daughter, Thankful Sage, who in turn is the namesake of one of Gerding's North Country ancestors, Thankful Sage Robinson. She was mother to Lewis Sage Robinson, who built the historic 1836 Robinson Tavern on the Military Turnpike that runs north of Plattsburgh—once also called Monroe Highway, in honor of President Monroe's 1817 trip to Plattsburgh. Gerding and her parents made regular summertime visits to the Adirondacks throughout her childhood. She said she is tied to this place, feeling a strong ancestral pull toward settling, working and raising her family in the North Country.

> She found herself transformed into the 19th-century equivalent of the Butterball Turkey Talk-line: "I would get messaged on every outlet—YouTube, email, voicemail, text—about sourdough.

Over the next five years she expects the footprint of her Willsboro farm to grow in tandem with her business. Currently she farms just one acre, but it is bursting with production. In addition to an extensive lavender patch, she grows tea herbs such as calendula, bergamot, comfrey, chamomile, sage and several types of mint. Her dye garden includes indigo, woad, weld, amaranth, madder and French marigolds. And a small fruit orchard is germinating, starting with elderberry and blueberry bushes.

Next year she plans to extend the farmed land to five acres. She wants to add heirloom New England apple tree varietals and flax, which will be used in her education series, as well as raise livestock as grass cutters. Her continued focus on growing herbs for teas and folk medicine and increasing capacity to cultivate and process plant-based textiles will be paired with an apiary to support

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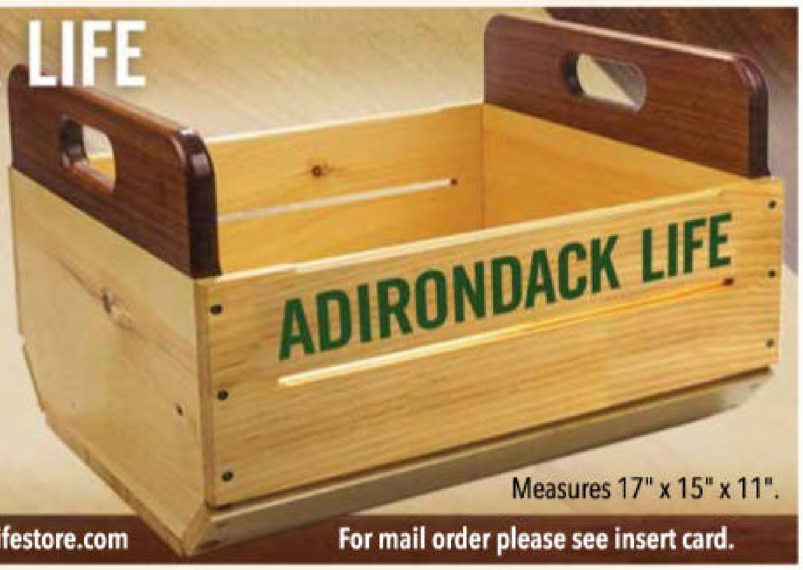

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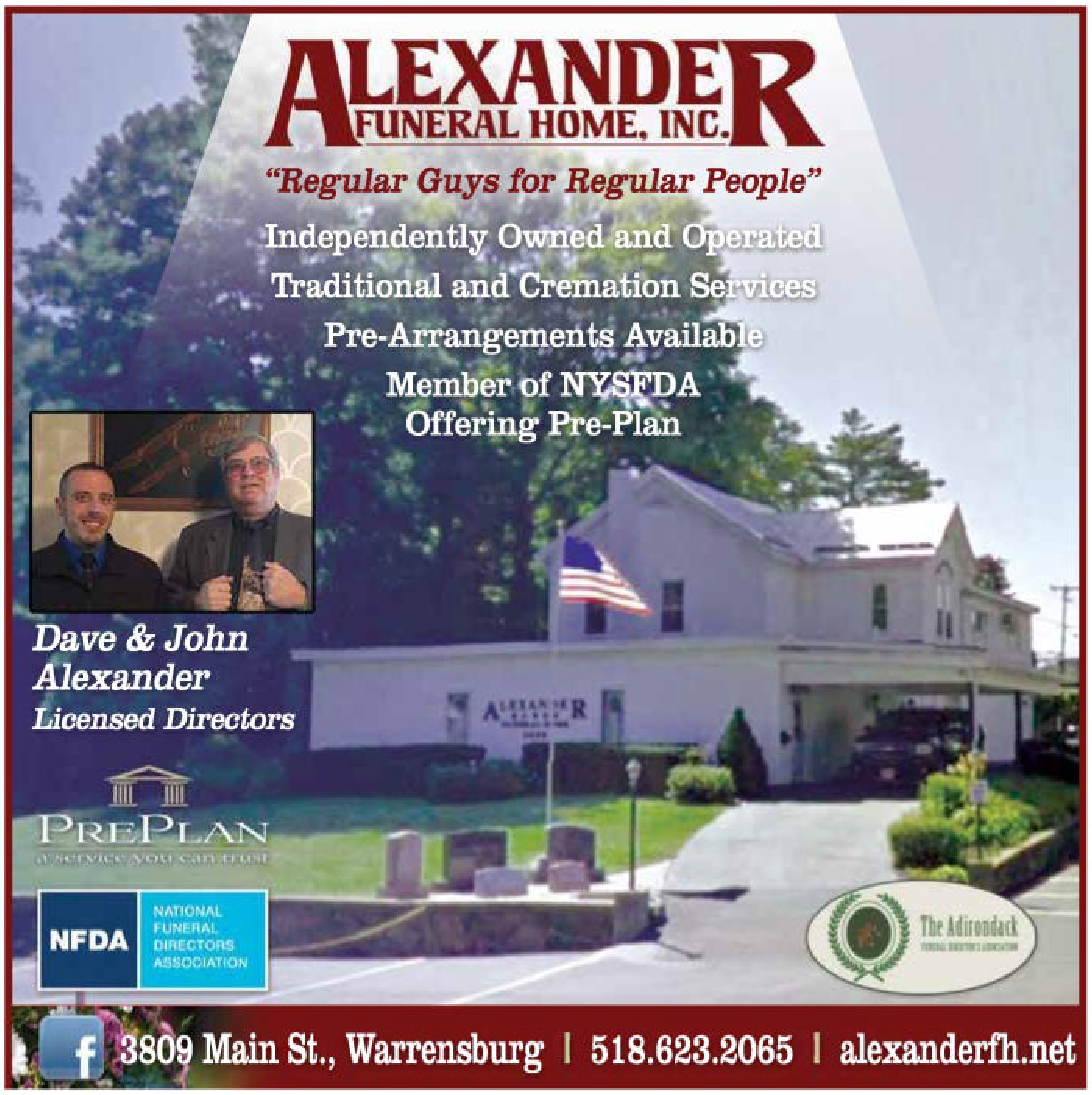

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beeswax and honey. Gerding also wants to grow her production team, hire and train heritage skills educators and farmhands, and offer more hands-on classes in the Adirondacks and around the country—using her farm as an experiential classroom to augment her virtual and in-person workshops. She said that Thankful Sage Farm School will come home once a portion of her Willsboro land is designated for live demonstrations and classes. In the meantime, winter remains a time of travel for Gerding. While her farm is largely dormant, she stays busy teaching traditional arts.

In addition to online outlets, Thankful Sage Farm School products are sold at Whitcomb's, a community space in Whallonsburg near the Whallonsburg Grange. Once a garage that sold cars, auto parts and snacks to local residents, Whitcomb's now offers artist studios and workshops, a public meeting room and a retail store filled with locally designed, forged, molded, fabricated and dried products—from flowers to ironwork, woodcraft, textiles, prints, candles, soaps, jewelry and more. Teddi Rogers, the store's curator and owner of Kit+Syl Studio, said there are customers who smell every one of Gerding's bars of soap and candles during their visits, with locals returning to stock up on Dirt and Black Tea scents and tourists most often choosing Woodsmoke—perhaps in an effort to take the Adirondacks with them when they leave.

Gerding said she was "put here to teach people about things they forgot," to resurrect collective memory one individual at a time. By slowing down, focusing on her work as a traditional artist and living a life infused with centuries-old knowledge and practices, she reminds us that time is refreshing. We can wash ourselves in woodsmoke. And stop and smell the dirt. ▲

See www.thankfulsagefarmschool.com for products, journal entries and educational videos—including a primer on making sourdough bread—or follow happenings at the farm on Facebook and Instagram. Find Whitcomb's (518-412-2056) at 1598 Route 22, in Whallonsburg.

DANGER ZONE
Continued from page 41

But one thing that hasn't changed, at least not as much, is the risk. On a Saturday in February 2022, two skiers ascending the Angel Slides area of Wright Peak were engulfed in a wave of snow cascading down from above. Tragedy was narrowly averted when one skier was able to free himself and locate and revive his companion—unresponsive and buried upside down beneath the snow—using beacons that, along with probes and shovels, are essential equipment among backcountry skiers.

A month later, a climber died in Mount Colden's notorious Trap Dike in what was initially believed to be an avalanche, but is now suspected to have been a fall under excessively icy conditions. Either way, the back-to-back events rattled the alpine-adventure community, and validated the focus on safety as more people take up the sport.

What had been steady growth in winter alpine adventures over the past 20 years accelerated during the pandemic when ski resorts were forced to close. Skiers turned to the backcountry, where they found they liked the solitude and sense of adventure, and didn't miss expensive lift tickets or lengthy lines.

Seasoned skiers and climbers are generally happy about this circumstance, willing to share the joy of a sport they love. But they are also cautious, fearing that more people could lead to more skier-triggered avalanches, particularly if those skiers are not well-trained and carrying essential rescue gear.

In response, outfitters, ski associations and the New York Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) are raising awareness, working to improve communication and provide new tools designed to keep participants in this edgy sport as safe as possible.

"There is very little margin for error; wind can take a beautiful, crystalline snowflake and turn it into a ball bearing," said Wise, owner of The Mountaineer, a gear retailer in Keene Valley that also sponsors comprehensive training and rescue courses developed by the American Institute for Avalanche Research and Education.

Unlike backcountry ski havens like the

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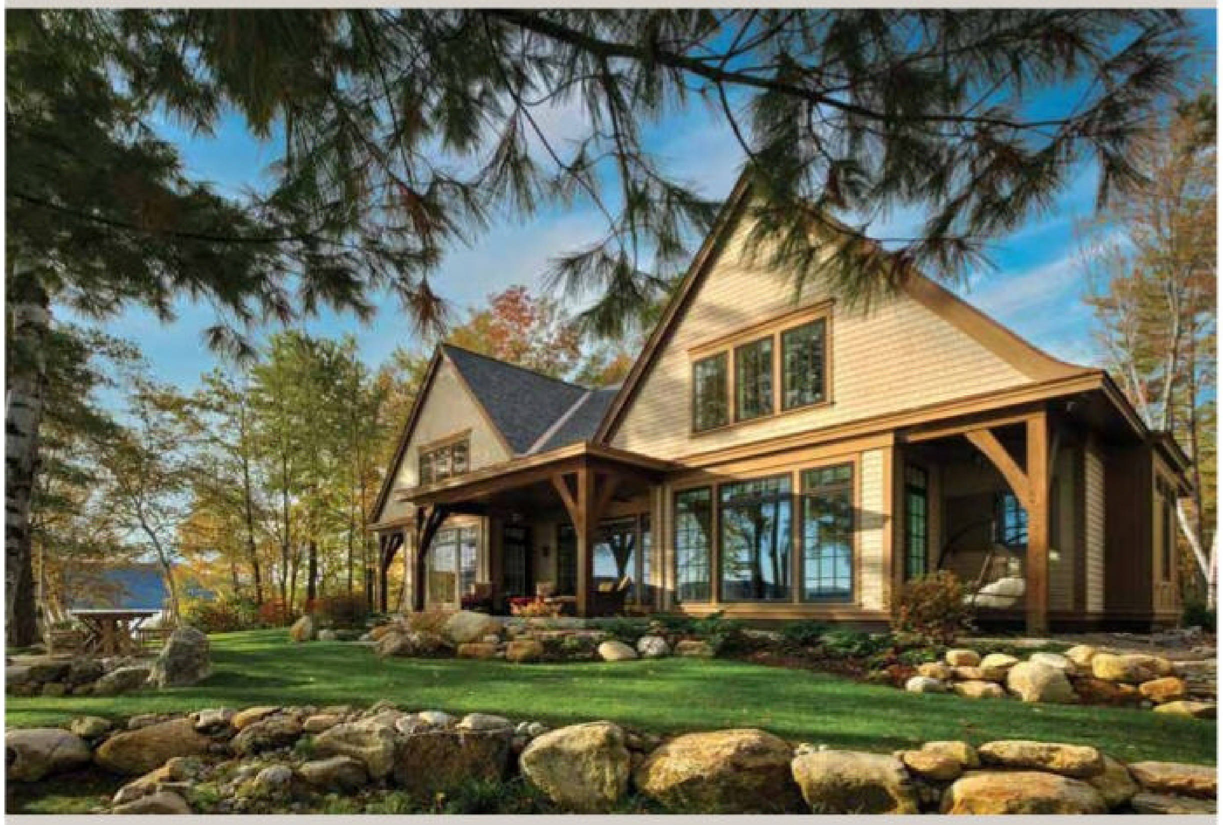

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Rockies and Whites, there are no regular state-level avalanche forecasts in the Adirondacks, leaving skiers to assess the risks on their own.

Conditions are shared on social media sites, but Roth said the quality of these reports is uneven, and can lead to a false sense of security.

Hoping to improve the flow of information, Caitlin Kelly and Nate Trachte founded the Adirondack Community Avalanche Project last year, which includes the crowdsourcing website adkavy.org to relay backcountry conditions.

Trachte, an alpine ski racer who began skiing Whiteface Mountain as a toddler, said Adirondack avalanches happen more frequently than is reported in the popular press. "We don't have as much avalanche terrain, and not as many people are regularly entering avalanche terrain as you might have in Colorado, but avalanches of varying size and consequence happen quite regularly in our mountains," he said. "Within the first month of launching the Adirondack Community Avalanche Project last winter, we received three confirmed reports of skier-triggered avalanches with the destructive potential to bury, injure or kill a person."

"There is a huge amount of joy and satisfaction when you make a real cool powder turn, but if there are any red flags, I turn around," said Kevin Burns, a DEC ranger who became caretaker at the Lake Colden outpost in 1989 and has participated in extensive avalanche training.

Those red flags can include wind direction, evidence of avalanches on other slides, the aspect of a slope or even an unspoken sense of apprehension among members of the group. Skiing the backcountry, Burns said, is a process, not something to be done on a whim. "You need to do your trip planning days in advance, or you're going to be behind the eight ball," he said. Planning includes having a secondary adventure in mind should the main objective look sketchy.

It's important to know not just current weather, but past weather as well. Wind, rain, freezing rain, wet snow, dry snow, melting snow—all these, even if they happened weeks in the past, can mean the difference between an anchored

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snowpack and one that is prone to sliding off its base like cookies off a Teflon sheet pan.

Ron Konowitz has seen the destructive power first-hand, being a member of the party that experienced a deadly avalanche in 2000. Konowitz began skiing the Adirondack backcountry 50 years ago, and was the first to ski all 46 of the High Peaks. He also maintains the historical record of backcountry skiing in the Adirondacks, which first became a thing in the 1920s. But due to the remote nature of Adirondack slides and cumbersome gear, the sport was only for the hardy few back then.

That seemed likely to change after World War II, when military mountain divisions prompted great advancements in skis, bindings and boots. But the post-war era introduced another innovation: the chair lift. Downhill skiing became the purview not of the mountainous backcountry, but of glamorous resorts with drive-up access and toasty lodges.

There things might have stood in the Adirondacks, had nature itself not delivered a counterpunch. Two terrain-altering hurricanes saturated the High Peaks with unprecedented amounts of rain, causing great swaths of thin-soiled forest to lose purchase and peel away from the bedrock, leaving gleaming, skiable streaks of anorthosite running vertically down mountain flanks.

Tropical Storm Floyd in 1999 created 18 new slides, Konowitz said, and a dozen years later Tropical Storm Irene created 36 more. “Many were a mile or more in length and crossed or came very close to existing hiking trails, making access much easier,” Konowitz said.

Konowitz was on one of these slides on Wright Peak in 2000 when the snow gave way, and he was “violently dragged at high speeds in the snow for more than 1,000 feet, bouncing off rocks, ledges and trees,” he said. “My skis, poles and pack were gone, having been ripped off my body. My ski jacket and bibs were torn and tattered. Somehow I was spared.”

A companion was not, becoming the first and to date only avalanche fatality in the Adirondacks. The accident highlighted a backcountry truth that no matter

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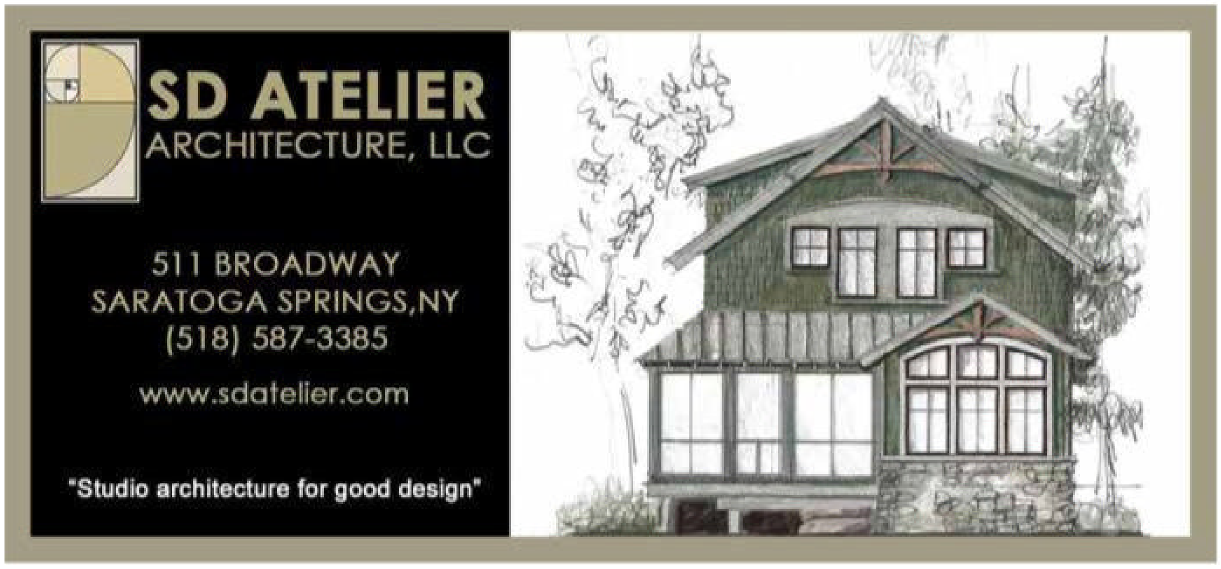
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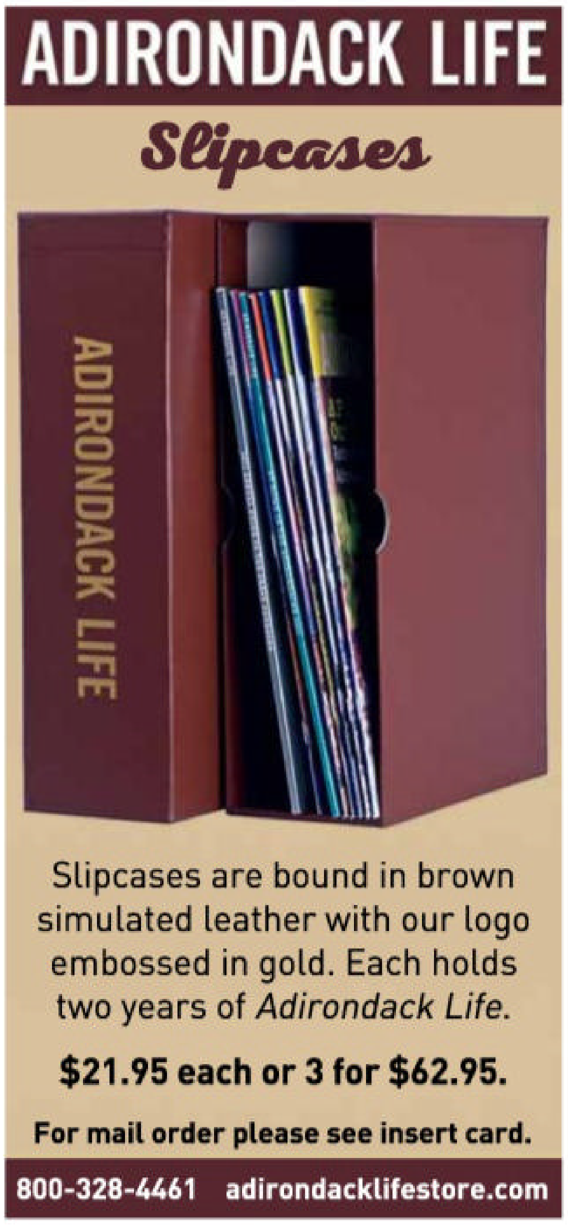
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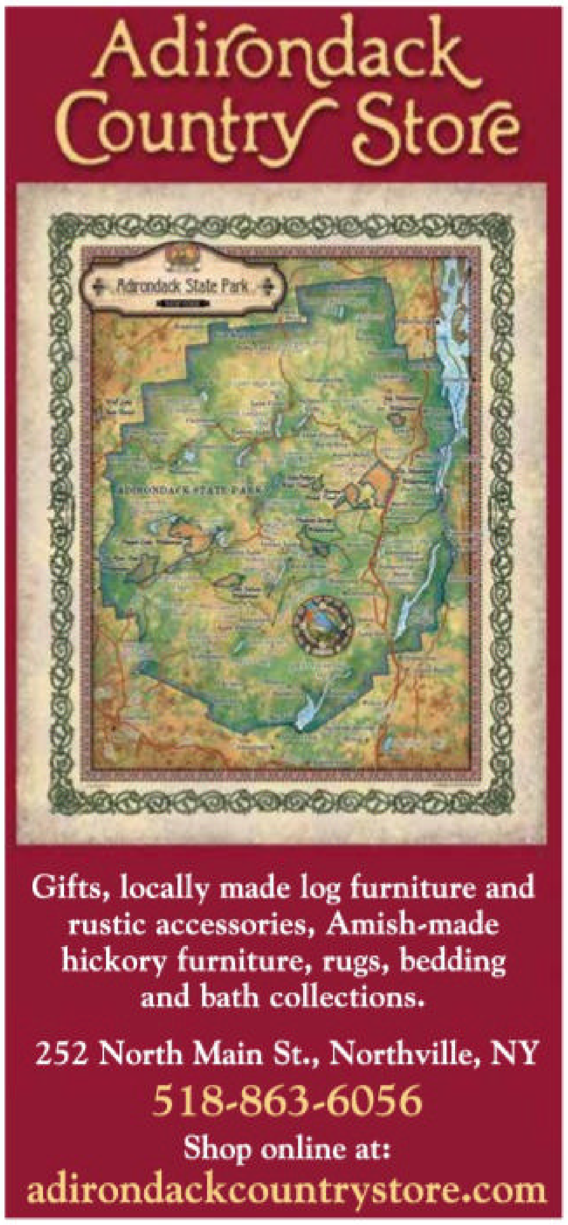
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how experienced and how well-prepared skiers might be, one totally random event can change everything. Conditions can be studied, but never entirely known.

Snow, said Josh Worth, a member of the National Ski Patrol who investigated the more recent Wright Peak avalanche, is a curious substance. Depending on conditions, it can act like a solid, a liquid or a gas, adding to its unpredictability. The snowpack is also spatially variable, he said, meaning that while much of a slope may be safe, key parts of it may not.

Skiers analyze the snowpack by digging pits and studying the strata, almost like the rings of a tree. But even this due diligence may not detect a small area of instability somewhere on the slope, acting as a fuse just waiting to be lit by the weight of an approaching skier. "Humans make great triggers for these things," Worth said.

And there are more of these triggers plying the peaks with each passing season. "For a long time only a very fringe group would even entertain the notion," Wise said. But better gear—wider skis, stronger skins for climbing, technically advanced bindings and alpine touring boots with heels that can be free (for cross country) or locked (for downhill) are opening new possibilities.

Just as important for success is the human element. Experienced backcountry skiers recommend that newcomers to the sport learn the vagaries of the mountains with the help of veteran experts or professional guides.

That's the best way to learn both the dangers and the joys. "While slide skiing, someone can experience wind-slabbed snow, wind-blown boilerplate ice and exposed rock," Konowitz said. "They can also experience the life-altering bliss of a top-to-bottom, ridiculously wonderful powder run." ▲

See the Adirondack Community Avalanche Project at adkavy.org for weather and terrain reports or to submit your observations of Adirondack conditions.

For information about High Peaks avalanche safety courses and essential gear, contact The Mountaineer (mountaineer.com), in Keene Valley, at (518) 576-2281.

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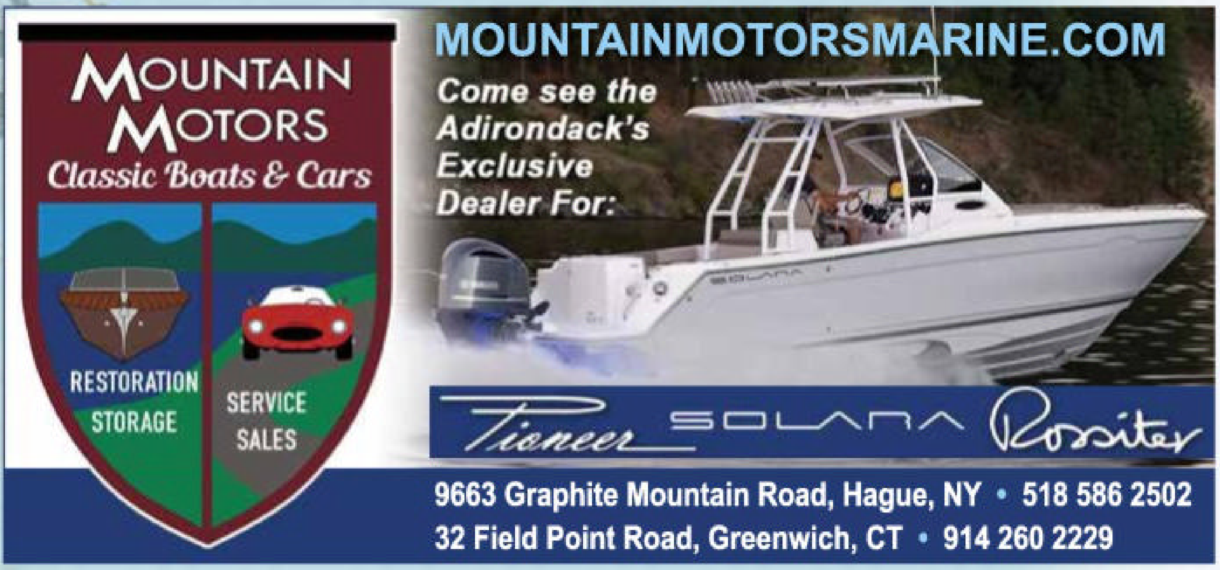

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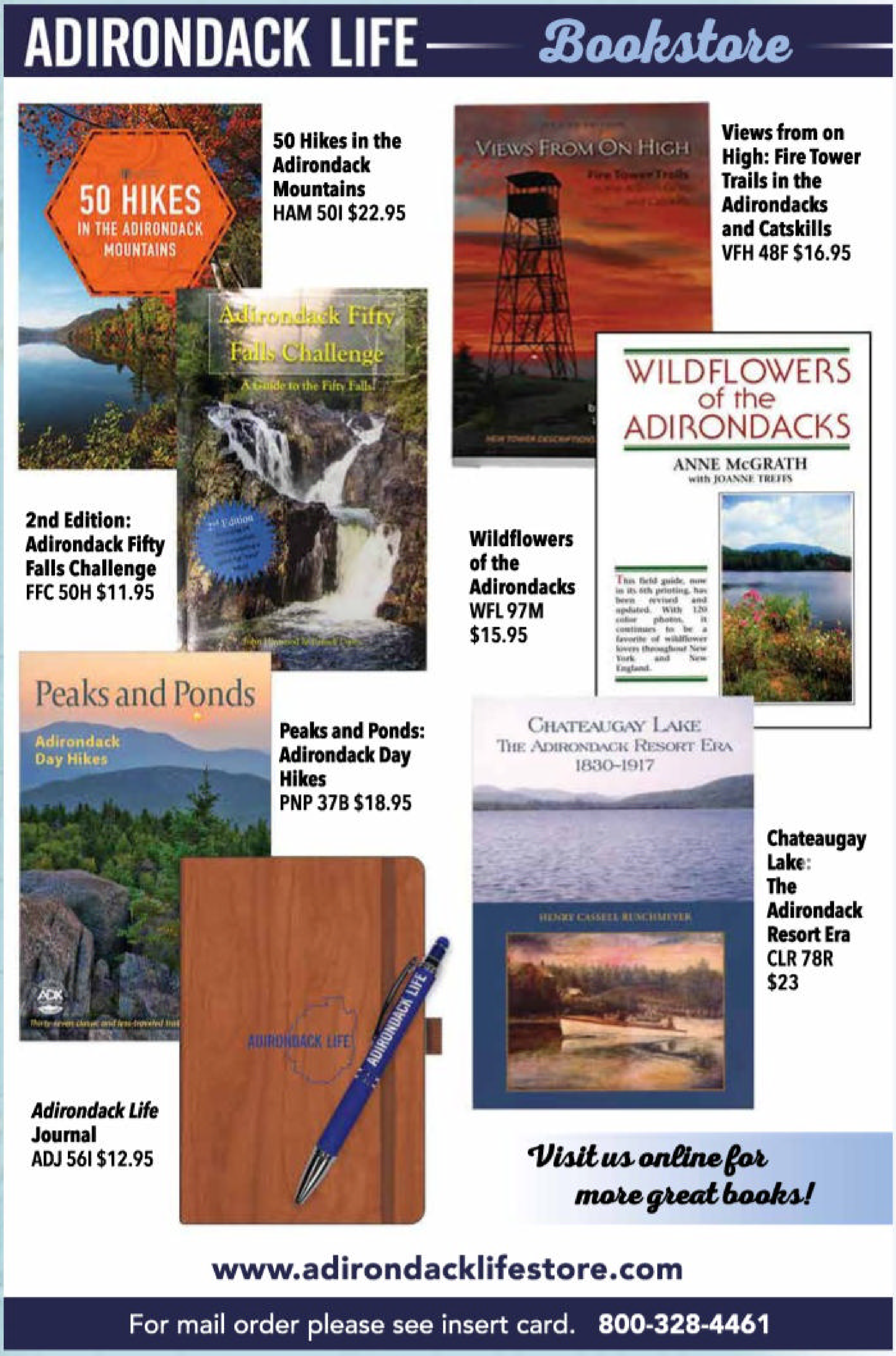

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EXPERIENCE THE NORTH COUNTRY WATERWAYS

FOR THE RECORD

Continued from page 45

Saranac Lake, which was once owned by Black residents of Auburn, Rhinebeck and Poughkeepsie.

Herein lay a clue to the Negro Brook puzzle: I could now see that most of it ran through granted parcels, but how many of them were actually settled by people who might have inspired the label?

I then studied census records that listed the names, occupations and races of local residents. That showed how wrong Donaldson was. Black settlers were scattered across the landscape and often stayed here longer than many Euro-American settlers.

Diffuse groups of African Americans around North Elba ("Timbuctoo") and Loon Lake ("Blacksville") became widely known through their associations with Brown and Hodges, but the records also revealed many such settlers around Vermontville. More than a dozen arrived with or without families during the mid-1800s, some as Smith grantees, others on their own, and many with inspiring stories of courage, resilience and persistence.

Among them was John Thomas, who had escaped from bondage in Maryland around 1840. After spending several years in Troy, he accepted a Smith lot near Plumadore Pond that proved to be too remote from roads and other necessities. He later settled on better land and on his own terms, buying a property on Muzzy Road where he ran a prosperous farm and raised a family with his wife, Mary. In 1872, John Thomas sent a letter to Gerrit Smith to thank him and tell of his success. "I have breasted the storm of prejudice and opposition," he wrote, "until I begin to be regarded as an American citizen."

As the quote implies, Black settlers faced more than the physical challenges of wilderness life. They also faced a blend of hostility and acceptance among their white neighbors. In the diary of Rainbow Lake hotelier James Wardner, for example, the writer told pathetically racist anecdotes about a "Negro Thomas" who lived nearby. In contrast, local lore has it that when Thomas's former "owner" sent bounty hunters to recapture him, Adirondack residents helped him drive the thugs away. And when he

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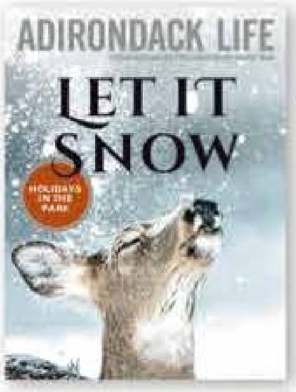
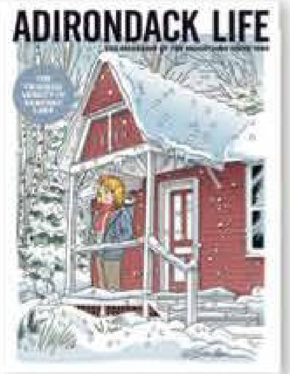

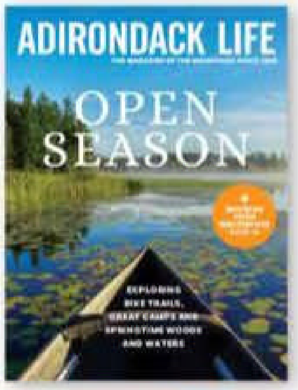
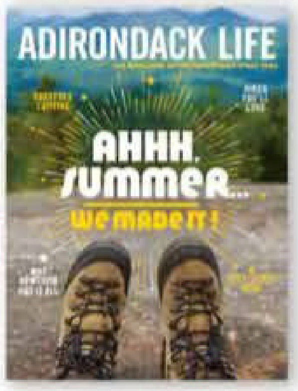
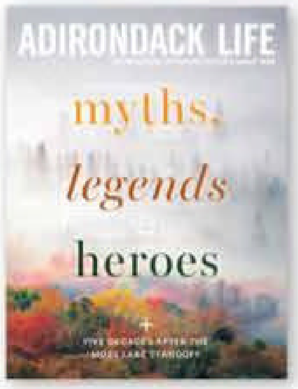
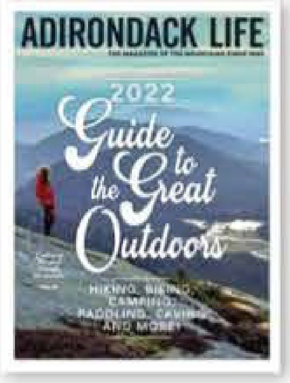

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died in 1894, the *Malone Palladium* printed this: “Mr. Thomas was an honest, upright and fair dealing man, a good citizen and much respected in the community where he lived so long.”

Louisa and James Brady, also from Maryland, were well established in Vermontville when the Civil War broke out. In 1863 their 20-year-old son Samuel enlisted in the mostly-white Adirondack Regiment that his father had joined the year before. In doing so he left his mother alone and probably frightened to see her son go to war as well. At least he would be in his father’s regiment, or so they thought. The next day Samuel was reassigned to the 20th U.S. Colored Troops. Within a few months he was shipped to New Orleans where there was little fighting, surely a relief to Louisa.

James would survive the war but by September of 1864 Samuel had perished. A military report stated “this colored boy is said to have died in the service, particulars unknown,” but only one member of that regiment was killed in action there; 263 died of disease in the hot, filthy delta around the city. Samuel now lies in Chalmette National Cemetery, in New Orleans, far from his home and his mother.

Louisa’s marriage crumbled soon after James returned to Vermontville, perhaps as another casualty of the war and their tragic loss. James later remarried and moved to Malone. Louisa remained in Vermontville until her death in 1894.

The stories of these people helped solve the mystery of the brook. Wardner’s diary mentioned a housekeeper named “Mrs. Brady” who was part of a community of Black farmers in Vermontville, some of whom tended onion gardens along the banks of a stream that thereby became known as “N—r Brook.” Local residents also told me that a knoll overlooking the stream was called “N—r Hill.”

Of all the settlers, Stephen “Warren” Morehouse interested me the most. The 1850 census listed him as a teenager living with his parents and sister as Smith grantees on the road leading uphill to Loon Lake, where a vintage county map places a Morehouse residence. The 1860 census shows that, for unspecified reasons, Warren and his mother Helen were left on their own and working as servants at a hotel on Lower St. Regis Lake that was recently established by their former Loon Lake neighbors Paul and Lydia Smith. As some of the first employees of that hotel, Warren and Helen contributed to the success of the resort that later became a college and now employs me.

By 1863 Warren was in Boston, probably working as a waiter. The Emancipation Proclamation had been issued, the battle of Gettysburg had turned the tide of the war in favor of the Union, and the Massachusetts 54th Colored Infantry Regiment had just made their epic assault on Fort Wagner, South Carolina, that is now memorialized in the film *Glory*. In doing so they proved to skeptics on both sides of the war that African-American soldiers could be as brave and capable as any others. On September 7, Warren joined the famed 54th.

His decision to enlist tells us much about the character of this young man from the Adirondacks. The regiment was accepting new recruits because so many had died in battle already. The Confederacy had announced that Black Union soldiers captured in uniform would be enslaved or executed. Members of the 54th knew that their behavior was under constant scrutiny; mistakes would be taken as evidence that soldiers of color were unfit for service, and until the government agreed to pay them as much as white troops they would refuse any pay at all. But unlike most white recruits who enlisted mainly to preserve the old Union, the 54th would also put their lives at exceptional risk to help create a more perfect Union by demonstrating the worth of Black Americans and liberating people from bondage.

By signing up under those circumstances, Warren was already a hero. But the official record of the regiment also shows that his service would rise beyond expectations. During the next two years Warren saw frequent combat in South Carolina, including the siege of Charleston under conditions so harsh that many soldiers fainted from sunstroke in the midst of battle. He was mentioned twice for his exploits as a sharpshooter and scout, a formidable warrior despite his

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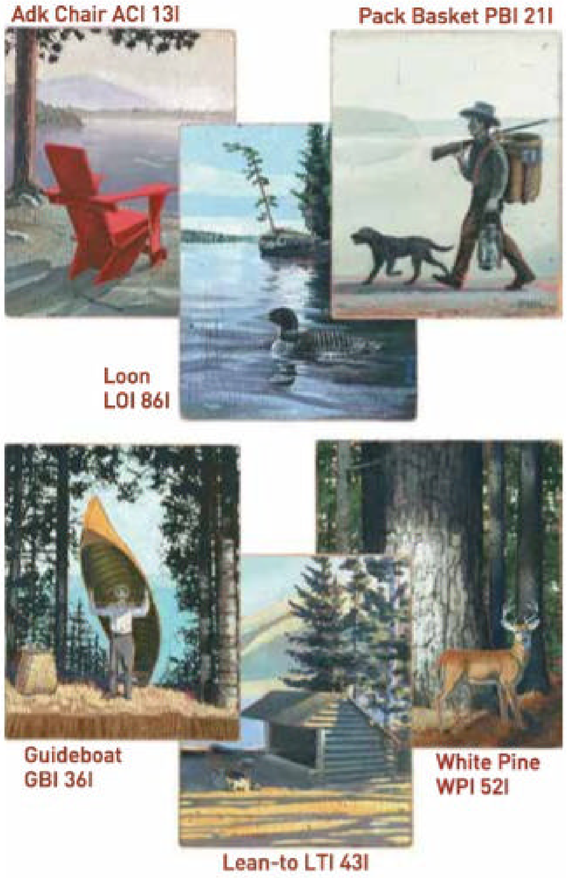

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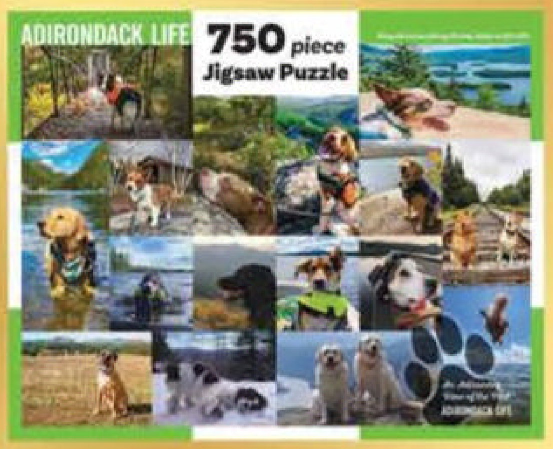
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relatively short stature at five feet two inches. And while in Florida, he and his comrades performed an astonishing feat of stamina and selfless courage.

After numerous skirmishes during an ill-fated offensive against Tallahassee, the 54th paused to rest among the pines near Lake City, when an urgent call for help came. Union troops were being routed in the Battle of Olustee, and they needed someone to cover their retreat. The regiment leaped up and ran toward the thunder of cannon fire, discarding much of their gear to increase their speed as they raced past fleeing men who yelled to them, "You'll all get killed!" Standing alone against vastly superior forces, they held the enemy in check until nightfall. Without aid or instructions on when to retreat, they finally gave a loud cheer to imply that reinforcements had arrived and withdrew in the darkness. All wounded Black soldiers who of necessity were left behind were slaughtered by the Confederates.

There's more. Soon after reaching Camp Shaw near Jacksonville, the 54th was ordered to march back toward Olustee because a train laden with wounded had broken down during the retreat and was vulnerable to attack. Upon reaching it, the exhausted, hungry men tied heavy ropes to the stalled locomotive. Then, with half of them shoeless from lack of pay and their recent dash into battle, they slowly pushed and hauled the train—engine, cars, wounded—three miles back to Camp Shaw.

An eyewitness wrote of that day: "They knew their fate if captured; their humanity triumphed. Does history record a nobler deed?"

After the war, the 54th marched past cheering crowds in Boston while a band played "John Brown's Body." Warren then moved to Vermontville, where he married John Thomas's daughter Charlotte, settled on Swinyer Road, raised four kids, and worked as a "servingman" at a nearby inn. I can only imagine his feelings while taking orders from unappreciative white customers who knew or cared nothing about the remarkable man serving them. Like many of his former brothers in arms who bore the physical and psychological scars of battle, Warren died young, in 1882, at the age of 45.

Fast forward to July 4, 2022. I stand in Vermontville's Union Cemetery, where John Thomas, Louisa Brady and Warren Morehouse are buried. A small American flag flutters next to Warren's grave, a humble acknowledgment of his military service to the nation. How ironic that the pseudo-historian who wrote that these people were too lazy and incompetent to live here still receives local accolades. There's a peak—Mount Donaldson—named after him. The Black pioneers of Vermontville got a pejorative N—r Brook and N—r Hill to remind us of them. But such oversights are beginning to change as more scholars enrich our knowledge of Adirondack history.

Recently, my wife, Kary, and I completed a 5,000-mile journey of remembrance through the South. We visited sites of importance to these settlers, whom we've come to admire after learning about them. Now, on Independence Day, two dozen friends and neighbors join us at Vermontville's Union Cemetery.

As morning sunlight warms the headstones, I kneel beside each grave to leave a personal offering: a pinch of soil from John Thomas's former place of enslavement in Maryland to commemorate his long road to freedom and respect. For Louisa, soil from Samuel's lonesome grave in New Orleans, where Kary and I left him comforting earth from his mother's resting place. And a handful of Florida sand from the Olustee battlefield to celebrate Warren's courage.

One by one we move close to pay our respects. Soon the graves are decked with flowers, Lincoln pennies to symbolize the victory over enslavement that these unsung heroes contributed to, and quiet tears to honor the memories of our fellow Adirondackers.

We see you now, John Thomas, Louisa Brady and Warren Morehouse. We see you.

Curt Stager is a professor of Natural Sciences at Paul Smith's College. He wrote "Hidden Heritage," about the Indigenous history of the Adirondacks, in the June 2017 issue of this magazine.

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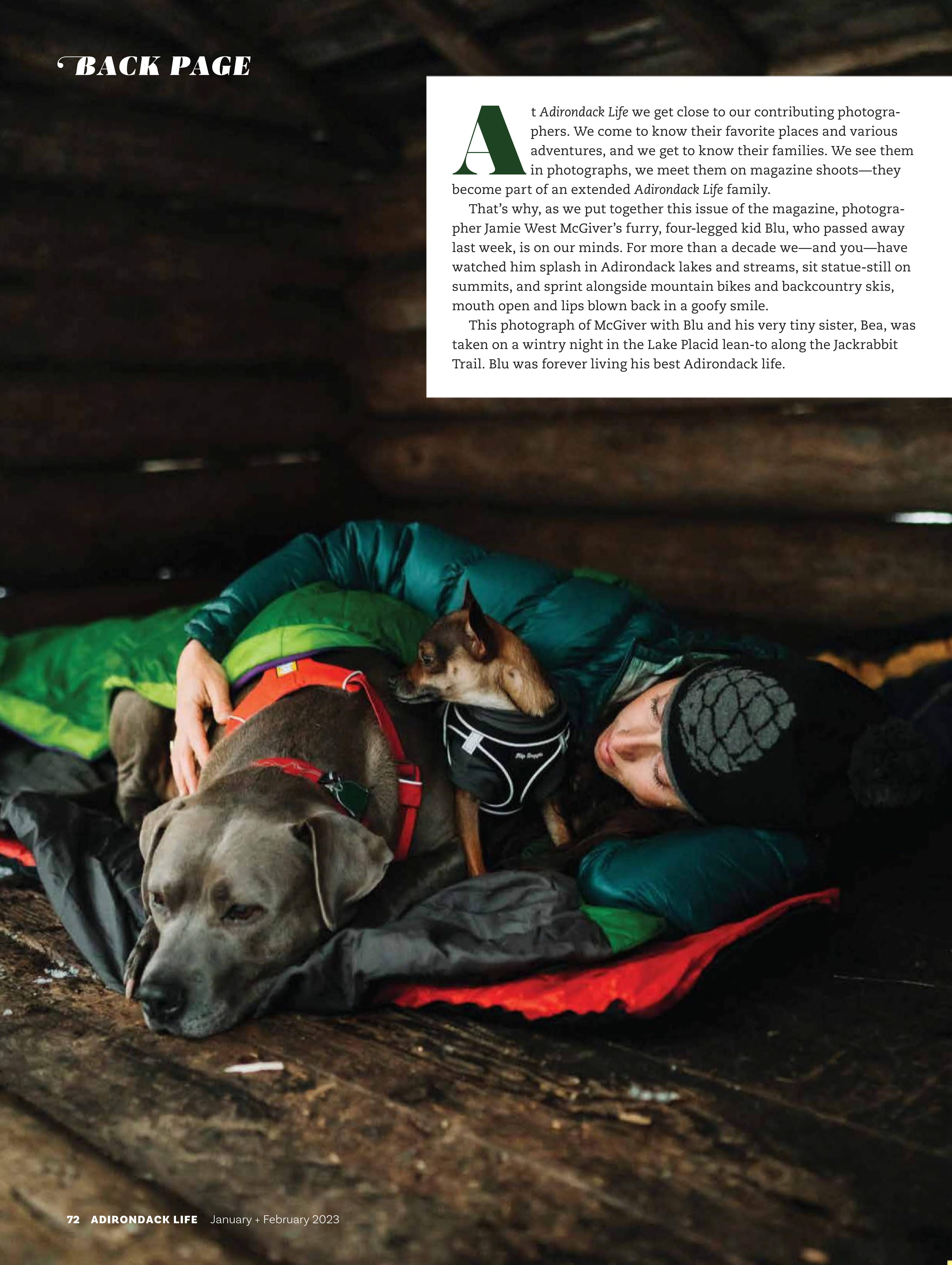
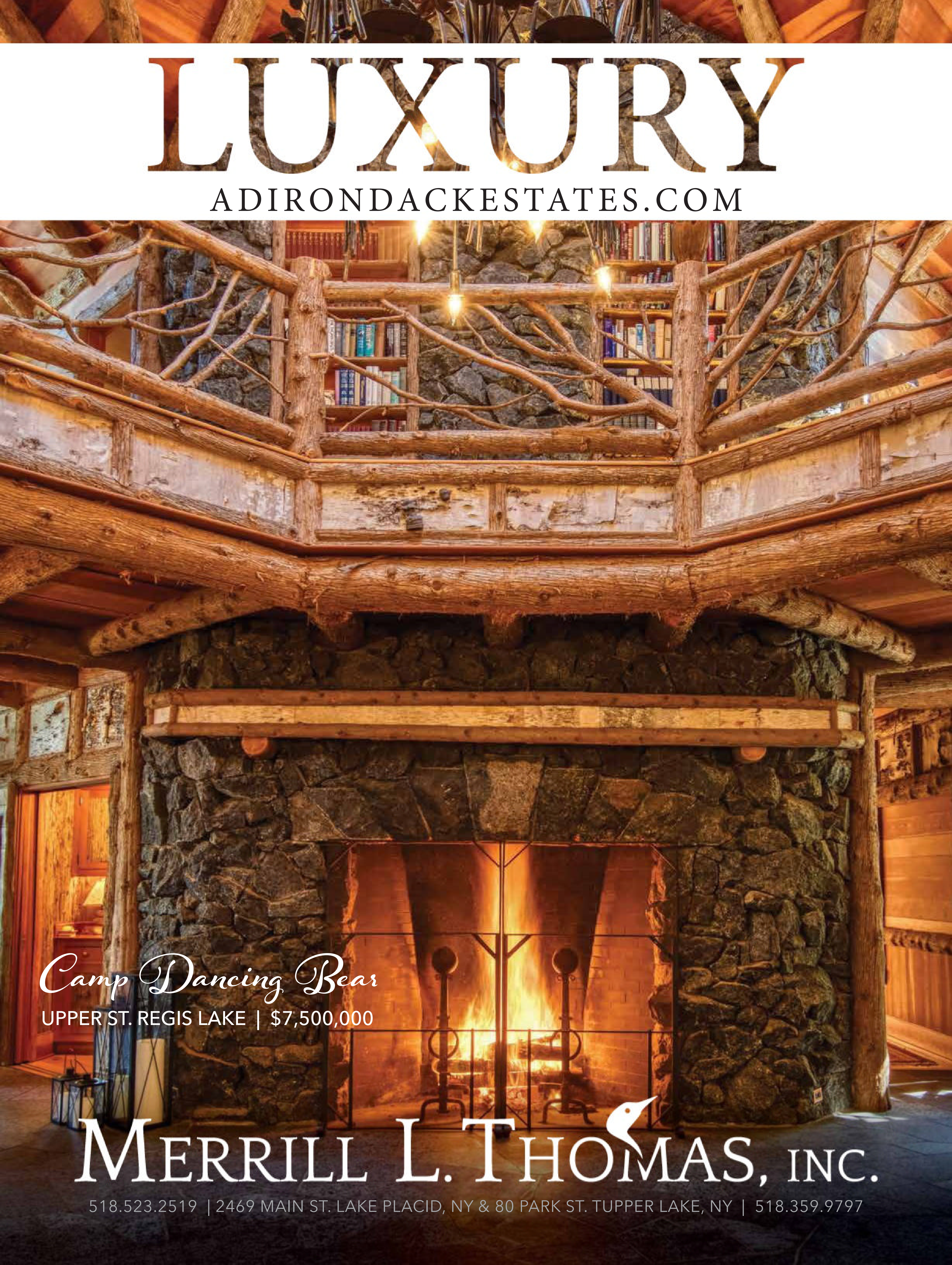
At *Adirondack Life* we get close to our contributing photographers. We come to know their favorite places and various adventures, and we get to know their families. We see them in photographs, we meet them on magazine shoots—they become part of an extended *Adirondack Life* family.

That's why, as we put together this issue of the magazine, photographer Jamie West McGiver's furry, four-legged kid Blu, who passed away last week, is on our minds. For more than a decade we—and you—have watched him splash in Adirondack lakes and streams, sit statue-still on summits, and sprint alongside mountain bikes and backcountry skis, mouth open and lips blown back in a goofy smile.

This photograph of McGiver with Blu and his very tiny sister, Bea, was taken on a wintry night in the Lake Placid lean-to along the Jackrabbit Trail. Blu was forever living his best Adirondack life.





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